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# SPRING BOOKS ISSUE

THE TRUTH ABOUT PERESTROIKA

BORIS KAGARLITSKY

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

MARTIN GOTTLIEB

THE GREAT AMERICAN (SIXTIES) NOVEL

JOHN LEONARD

FILMS FROM THREE NATIONS

STUART KLAWANS

LEARNING TO LOVE IMPERIALISM

PETER TARR

COMING OF AGE IN TORONTO

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# LETTERS.

## POLITICS AND THE V.O.A.

*Brooklyn*

On March 13, I published a short editorial in *The Nation* ["G.O.P. Formula"] decrying some current and proposed leadership in the United States Information Agency. I not only found problems with the proposed U.S.I.A. head but also with Reagan Administration holdover Richard Carlson, chief of the Voice of America, a section of the U.S.I.A.

Carlson has threatened suit against me and *The Nation* if we do not issue an apology and retraction of one of the precisely three sentences I devoted to him in that editorial.

The offending sentence reads: "According to an article by V.O.A. staff member Carolyn Weaver in the *Columbia Journalism Review* for November/December 1988, Carlson helped subvert the agency's charter by employing the radio network to pass intelligence messages, including at least one from Oliver North."

I believe that the Reagan Administration sought to politicize the Voice of America and to use it to advance an essentially rightist agenda. And I believe that to politicize the V.O.A. is a violation of its charter.

I base my belief in part on National Security Decision Directive 130 (see "Reagan's Global Reach" by Jeff Chester in *CJR* for March/April 1985). That classified document, obtained by the press in 1984, revealed that the N.S.C. saw the V.O.A., among others, as "an integral part of US national security policy and strategy," a policy that came to pass.

As for Carlson's direct role, I think he deserves a clarification. I am not aware of any evidence that the plan to use the V.O.A. to pass on intelligence messages was Carlson's. It was the scheme of Oliver North, with the help of State Department official L. Paul Bremer, as revealed by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Bremer pressured the V.O.A. into running a Farsi-language editorial which, North hoped, would speed up the arms-for-hostages trade.

Carlson claims to *The Nation* that when this action occurred, he himself was out of the country and that he had no knowledge of it. Maybe so. But he was the V.O.A. director at the time, and he continues to defend the broadcast.

Carlson told *The Washington Post* on January 30, 1987, that "while the situation was quite unusual, we don't think the editorial contained any material that was impermissible under our charter from Congress."

Well, I do. I also think that when its director defends the V.O.A.'s broadcast of intelligence messages it helps to subvert the agency's charter.

If Carlson can't stand for a bit of spirited criticism without calling for his attorney, then he is indeed in the wrong job, and I urge him once again to seek new employment posthaste. *Alec Dubro*

## LOVE A NATION, HATE A WOMAN?

*Oakland, Calif.*

I challenge Jackie Stevens to go beyond the smears and prove that I am a "nationalist" and a misogynist ["Talking About a Revolution," Feb. 27]. *Ishmael Reed*

## STEVENS REPLIES

*Berkeley, Calif.*

Ishmael Reed has cleverly set things up such that *I* have to explain *his* complaint—one more instance of men leaving their drudgework to women. The alternative explanation of his cryptic letter is that Reed is egocentric enough to believe *Nation* readers will remember that his name was mentioned once in my review of a book by Angela Davis. I wrote, "The absence in *Women, Culture and Politics* of a single reference to the misogyny of black nationalists such as Eldridge Cleaver, [Amiri] Baraka and Ishmael Reed is confusing and troubling." It was incorrect for me to have characterized Reed as a nationalist, and he has my apologies on that count. Reed's obsessive demonization of African-American women writers, however, is indeed misogynist.

As a purely personal matter, Reed's jealousy of the recognition accorded the work of other writers makes some sense. That he chooses to blame feminists for his lack of a large audience, however, lends an insidious quality to his disappointment. When he refers to Toni Morrison and Alice Walker as "literary mammies," Reed himself becomes the bullying African-American male character that he criticizes as unrealistic in their novels.

I have no intention of speaking to Reed's challenge directly, which would entail dragging him and others through a lot of mud for no good reason. Reed's tantrums do not deserve such serious attention, which would only create further division among people who ought to be allies; there are a lot of rich white men who are far more deserving of that scrutiny. Likewise, in a society run by General Electric, the National Security Council, *USA Today* and McDonald's, Reed's attacks on Alice Walker seem rather misdirected.

*Jackie Stevens*

## VOTING FIGHTS

*Atlanta*

Ben Tutoli's April 10 letter on my review of Abigail Thernstrom's book about voting rights [Feb. 20] raises three points that call for a response. Using diversity within the population to make judgments about the adequacy of minority progress is widespread in American race relations and needs no new rationalization from me. Without this kind of reasoning we would surely have to apply some "absolute" standard that would be neither pragmatic nor democratic. Focusing on the fit between minority presence in the population and capacity to exercise voting choice merely extends this kind of reasoning to elections and, in my opinion, is fitting, if only pragmatic. I criticize Thernstrom because she, like politicians who opposed the Voting Rights Act, uses "proportional representation" to invoke ominous images obscuring the more familiar process of minority advancement actually taking place. Sadly, this postpones any direct discussion of proportional representation or our actual experience with it.

Tutoli's challenge to me to account for "all the whites who voted for Jesse Jackson" calls up a myth that I hereby label as what it is: Outside of a feeble effort in a Chicago municipal election, Jackson's campaigns have been in party primaries, not general elections where voters make final decisions, so we need to be cautious about what we say about his voting support—white and black. Still, while running campaigns where we might expect racial crossover voting to be enhanced (in part because he had no chance of actually winning office), Jackson failed to draw significant numbers of white votes in the 1984 and 1988 Democratic Party presidential primaries. In fact, these results are now used to illustrate racial bloc voting in election discrimination lawsuits.

If *Nation* readers don't read Thernstrom's book they will get, in Tutoli's letter, a feel for the Orwellian discourse that prevails among those wishing to constrain the new political involvement of blacks by raising the specter of misguided affirmative action. Thus the pivotal increase in minority representation is called "tokenism," popular demands for single-member districts are said to betray a quietist urge for "separate but equal"—an antiblack U.S. Supreme Court doctrine. By this tactic they would dismiss the most exciting change in recent American political history, and misinform us all.

*Alex Willingham*

## THE U.N.'S BIGGEST DEADBEAT

*Washington*

Max Holland offered a mixed assessment of the late John J. McCloy in writing his obituary [April 3]. In skimming over McCloy's life he neglected to mention that McCloy negotiated in 1961 an agreement with the Soviet Union for general and complete disarmament and for the establishment of standing U.N. peacekeeping forces to assure world peace. The 1961 McCloy-Zorin agreement took the form of eight principles that were endorsed unanimously by the U.N. General Assembly. These principles were never implemented because of various factors, including the assassination of President Kennedy, the removal of Khrushchev from power and the Cuban missile crisis. But this agreement was the closest the superpowers and the world came to recognizing the re-

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Cover design by Louise Fili


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*Manuscripts:* The magazine cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts unless accompanied by addressed, stamped envelopes.

*Publisher*, Arthur L. Carter

*President and Associate Publisher*, David Parker; *General Manager*, Neil Black; *Advertising Director*, Chris Calhoun; *Business Manager*, Ann B. Epstein; *Bookkeepers*, Tanveer Mall, Ivor A. Richardson; *Art/Production Manager*, Jane Sharples; *Circulation Director*, Margaret Pyle; *Subscription Manager*, Cookee V. Klein; *Publicity Director*, Sarah Perl; *Director, Nation Books*, Elsa Dixler; *Assistant Advertising Manager*, Eamonn Fitzgerald; *Receptionists*, Greta Loell, Vivette Dhanukdhari; *Mail Clerk*, John Holtz; *Administrative Secretary*, Shirley Sulat; *Production*, Terry Miller; *Typography*, Randall Cherry, Sandy McCroskey; *Nation Associates: Director*, Sandra Zickefoose, *Assistant Director*, Carlos Durazo; *Syndication*, Jeff Sorensen; *New Business Manager*, Jay Pearsall; *Special Projects Director*, Peter G. Meyer; *InterNation*, Chris Calhoun.


*The Nation* (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the first week in January, and biweekly in July and August) by The Nation Company, Inc. © 1989 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, Inc., 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011. (212) 242-8400. *Washington Bureau:* Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. International Telex: 667 155 NATION. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: *The Nation*, Box 1953, Marion, OH 43305. *Subscription Price*: One year, $36; two years, $64. Add $14 for surface mail postage outside U.S. Claims for missed issues must be made within 60 days (120 days foreign) of publication date. **Please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $3 prepaid ($4 foreign) from: *The Nation*, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011. *The Nation* is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Nation*, Box 1953, Marion, OH 43305. This issue went to press on May 18.

# EDITORIALS.

## © Chaos, 1989

Four years ago, the Supreme Court held that *The Nation*'s quotation of about 300 words from the then-unpublished 200,000-word manuscript of Gerald Ford's memoirs was not "fair use" of the material, and that therefore we were guilty of copyright infringement. Our lawyers warned the Court that any rule of law prohibiting the quotation of such a small number of words in the context of news reporting and political commentary—our story was primarily about the circumstances under which President Ford decided to pardon former President Nixon—was a serious erosion of First Amendment rights. But we were a small dissident magazine fighting a former Chief Executive and a powerful publishing house, Harper & Row, which complained that the publication of our article had cost it the chance to sell first serial rights to *Time*. Although the PEN American Center came to our defense, the Association of American Publishers, representing the larger American trade publishers, filed an amicus brief on Harper & Row's behalf.

Two years later, in 1987, the reclusive novelist J.D. Salinger used the Supreme Court decision in the *Nation* case to get an injunction against Random House when Ian Hamilton, who was writing an unauthorized biography of Salinger, quoted about 250 words from his unpublished letters. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit said that,

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on the basis of the *Nation* decision, the use of that many words from unpublished letters was not fair use, and so enjoined the book from being published. The project was withdrawn, and a new biography was later issued that incorporated the story of the lawsuit but removed the offending letters. The book-publishing community began to get a little nervous about the implications of that decision but tried to minimize the importance of the case by suggesting that Salinger was an accomplished writer whose letters had great literary value that his heirs might want to exploit in the future.

Now comes a case involving an unauthorized and critical biography of L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, and the same U.S. Court of Appeals has pushed the doctrine of the inviolability of unpublished letters to its most ridiculous extreme. The book in that case, *Bare-Faced Messiah: The Story of L. Ron Hubbard*, was a full-length biography of Hubbard, which contradicted many of the claims made by the Scientologists about his life and, in the court's words, "depicted [him] as a charlatan and poseur." Many passages from his letters and journals were quoted by the author, Russell Miller. A Danish corporation, set up by the Church of Scientology and claiming to own all the copyrights to Hubbard's works, tried to have the book enjoined. An injunction was not issued against the publisher, Henry Holt & Company, because in this case the plaintiff had waited too long to go to court. But the court did hold in its April 19 decision that the quotation of virtually any amount of unpublished material does undercut any claim of fair use and, furthermore, that "the copying of 'more than minimal amounts' of unpublished expressive material calls for an injunction barring the unauthorized use." Thus, "unpublished works normally enjoy complete protection," said the court, from publishers of a book (or magazine or newspaper) seeking to print quotations from them.

The decision has created consternation not only among book and magazine publishers but among newspaper editors as well. *The New York Times* printed a front-page story about the case, warning that under the Hubbard decision Oliver North could get an injunction against a newspaper that quoted a letter he wrote about the Iran/*contra* affair. Lawyers, historians and authors were equally distraught. Unpublished letters, diaries, journals, speeches and conversations of historical figures are the basic building blocks and source materials of history and biography. Biographers must use their subject's words to make the work come alive, and to support their own theme or thesis. All unauthorized biographies of living figures are put at risk, since any quotation of their words above the minimal amount mentioned in the Hubbard case can provoke a copyright suit and an injunction against publication.

The case also reaches back into history. Under current law, all unpublished material of historical figures is subject to copyright until the year 2002 or fifty years after the author's death, whichever is later. Under the Hubbard case, a biography critical of Aaron Burr or Ulysses S. Grant that quotes from their unpublished letters could be enjoined by an unhappy descendant. Already a suit has been brought by author Richard Wright's widow against Warner Books, the publisher of his biography. Publishing lawyers have now rushed to urge the U.S. Court of Appeals to reconsider the Hubbard matter, since the decision puts at risk the basic methods of historical research and presentation and gives the powerful weapon of an injunction to the subjects of critical studies, as well as to their relatives.

It would be simple enough for us to gloat and say, We told you so, but the matter is too serious to indulge in self-satisfaction. Since the decision involved only an interpretation of the fair use provisions of the copyright law, it is an easy matter for Congress to amend the law to make it conform to the practice of authors and publishers in writing history and biography. We propose that Representative Robert Kastenmeier, as chair of the House Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property and the Administration of Justice, and Senator Dennis DeConcini, as chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Patents, Copyrights and Trademarks, immediately hold hearings on one or more amendments to the copyright law. Language such as the following should be added to what is now Section 107: "The factors to be considered in determining fair use shall apply equally to published and unpublished works, and unpublished material shall be treated the same way as published works have heretofore been treated." In amending the law, Congress should indicate its displeasure with and disapproval of the recent rulings, beginning with the *Nation* case, which deviate so far from the way politics and history are and necessarily ought to be written.

Also, we suggest that the automatic use of an injunction in a copyright infringement case must be re-examined. Chief Judge James Oakes of the Second Circuit wrote a separate opinion in the Hubbard case, criticizing the majority and stating that an injunction should not be automatically issued in cases where significant information about a historical or political subject would be restricted. Congress should also consider an amendment to Section 502 of the copyright law, to give courts more discretion to deny injunctions when they would restrict the dissemination of information on matters of history, news reporting, science or literature. If it was not clear four years ago, it should be perfectly clear now: The First Amendment has more of a role to play when copyright issues arise than the courts have acknowledged. On the occasion of our Spring Books issue, we invite the publishing community to join in the effort to persuade Congress to right the balance.

# T.R.'s Invention

At midnight, after the polls closed in Panama, the military stopped the count. The next day, when opposition supporters gathered to protest the fraud, the regime's goons opened fire on the crowd, killing one and wounding scores. Soon afterward, the election tribunal declared the official candidate the winner. That was in 1984. Washington praised the country's "democratization" and sent George Shultz to the inaugura-

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tion. In those days, too, Manuel Noriega was a son of a bitch, but, by God, he was still ours.

Observing the very different U.S. reaction to the fraud and violence of 1989, Robert Kurz, a Panama specialist at the Brookings Institution, says he found himself thinking of *Casablanca*—to be precise, the scene where the venal police chief, Captain Renault, visits Rick's bar and exclaims, with a very proper expression of outrage, "I am shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here," as he stuffs his winnings into a back pocket.

It's a useful analogy. Under the Vichy administration in French Morocco, everyone was assumed to have his price, and parasites were more common than patriots. In Panama, a society deformed in not dissimilar ways, it was easy—at least until recently—to deride Noriega's opponents as "Mercedes-Benz politicians." Their leaders were white and upper class and spoke charmingly accented English; their homes were likely to be adorned with signed photographs of Jeane Kirkpatrick. As even his friends would admit, Guillermo Endara, the opposition candidate in the 1989 election, was no Simón Bolívar. He laid claim to the tradition of Arnulfo Arias, the nationalist patriarch who died last year. But Endara was seen as a weak man who lacked charisma, and the anti-Noriega coalition chose him as its lowest common denominator.

Compared with the National Defense Forces, the U.S. Embassy and the local business community, Panama's political parties have never been of much account. Such parties as there were tended to be either relics of the oligarchy or tools of the military and the Embassy. But the election of May 7 changed all that. The scale of victory and the magnitude of fraud gave the opposition new legitimacy. It developed some semblance of a national organization, expanded and mobilized its base of support and won the backing of the Catholic Church for the first time. If Noriega had wanted to convert his mediocre opponents into powerful celebrities, there was no surer way to do so than to beat them bloody while the whole world was watching.

True, Endara's coalition has hardly become a force for radical social change. But it has at least ripped away Noriega's self-serving fiction that his adversaries were nothing but white, elitist Yankee stooges, while he stood for the poor, black majority of Panamanians. Blacks from the rotting slums of Panama City and Colón are now much in evidence in the opposition's ranks, as is organized labor.

One obvious reason for this is the general economic collapse brought about by U.S. sanctions. During the Reagan years the United States demonstrated, in Panama as in Nicaragua, that its power is now largely limited to destroying societies, not remaking them. George Bush's men may not be as crazy as Elliott Abrams, but they have no more of a clue about what to do: Send in a few troops to "defend the canal" (which the Pentagon acknowledged long ago to be impossible); bluster a bit about "overthrowing" Noriega; pump in some covert aid. Noriega benefited briefly from U.S. news reports that the C.I.A. was funding his opponents to the tune of $10 million. But even if the agency did pay for Endara's pamphlets and posters and radio broadcasts, there was another lesson to be drawn from this episode. The story appears to have started as an Administration leak to a journalist in Washington, and the most plausible explanation is that Noriega still has friends in the agency that he served so well for so long.

The drama now unfolding in Panama is a study in the pathology of imperial decline. In 1903, Teddy Roosevelt invented the country out of whole cloth; the United States set the stage for the present tragedy and created most of the actors. But it is almost powerless now to shape the outcome. For the first time, Washington has been obliged to endorse a social movement in Panama that it does not fully control. For the Panamanian opposition, the discovery of that independence may prove contagious. In that part of the world, the greatest impediment to real political life has always been the knowledge (and all too often the hope) that the U.S. Marines might step in and take the solution out of local hands. This time, barring madness or miscalculation, that is unlikely to happen. Panamanians will have to find their own solutions, even reinvent their country, and that's cause for some modest celebration. GEORGE BLACK

# The Point System

David Webster took me to tea in the garden of an absurdly genteel hotel on a hill above Johannesburg, near the University of the Witwatersrand—"Wits"—where he taught. It was late September, early spring in South Africa, and the leafy suburb was bursting with new life. Webster slumped in a white wrought-iron chair and made wry jokes about death.

"Repression is based on a point system," he explained when I inquired about life under the latest state of emergency, which had begun three months earlier, in June 1986. (It is still in effect.) "You get points for U.D.F. [United Democratic Front] membership, for being seen at a rally, for speaking at a rally, for attending a political meeting. You get the most points when you're observed making institutional contacts across racial lines—between a white draft-resistance group and a black protest organization in the townships, for instance.

"When you collect about six points you get anonymous threatening phone calls at 3 o'clock in the morning. At seven points you get dead cats on your doorstep and your tires slashed. At eight or nine points your phone is tapped and you're under surveillance. At ten points you're arrested and detained indefinitely without trial. Of course, that's the scoring system for whites. Whites start with a point credit, so there's more leeway. For blacks, the levels are entirely different. There's murder, hand grenades, petrol bombs and death squads. The death squads are a major new activity. South Africa got the idea from Israel, which is the model for a lot of tactics here. Some death squads have security police members, others hire a police freelance for a target or two."

Webster's mood swung widely between jaunty and grim, and I didn't realize that he was in fact beginning a study of the precise nature of the repression he detailed. As it turned out,

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it was not research without risk. On May 1, David Webster was gunned down in the street by assassins who roared past his Johannesburg home in a car. Just days before his death he had finished updating his report to the United Nations on the "steady tempo" of kidnappings and killings of anti-apartheid activists—part of the shift toward what he called "informal repression." South African journalist Pippa Green tells us that the killers may have been ultrarightist members of the security forces, infuriated by Webster's prominent role in publicizing the recent hunger strike by South African detainees. At the start of the strike, in January, more than 900 people were being held without trial under the state of emergency. Today there are about eighty. "If there was an element within the security police that resented the freeing of the detainees," says Max Coleman, who worked with Webster in the Detainees' Parents Support Committee, "they may have been looking for some way to get back at them." ANDREW KOPKIND

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CALVIN TRILLIN

My publishers couldn't seem to understand that what I wanted for my new book was simply the same publishing arrangement Jim Wright had. "I'll just take the straight 55 percent royalty deal," I told them. "I loathe quibbling."

My publishers said they had never offered more than 15 percent royalty to an author. I knew how to handle that one. I pushed back my chair and turned to my high-powered literary agent, Robert (Slowly) Lescher. "Let's walk, Slowly," I said. In a hardball publishing negotiation, this is a sentence that has to be said just right. Otherwise, it sounds as if you're saying that you want to walk slowly, giving the people on the other side of the table the impression that you're getting a little creaky in the joints, and may therefore be vulnerable.

Slowly put his hand on my arm. He turned to my publishers and told them that I was understandably upset at being offered a 15 percent royalty after hearing that another author got a 55 percent royalty even though he was a first-time author and his book was just a bunch of recycled high-school graduation speeches that had caused a lot of people to sigh and look at their wristwatches the first time around.

"We didn't offer 15 percent," my publishers said. "We said that we'd never offered more than 15 percent."

I pushed back my chair again. "C'mon, Slowly, we're history," I said.

Slowly put his hand on my arm—although this was quite a stretch, because every time I pushed back from the table I got farther away from him. "Wait a second," he said, speaking to me but enunciating clearly for the benefit of my publishers. "I know how you feel, and I don't blame you. And I'm not saying we should accept the 15 percent. But I think we should do our best to discuss this rationally, no matter how other people behave."

Gradually, I settled back in my seat. "O.K., Slowly," I said. "I'm willing to give it one more try."

This was all part of our negotiating strategy, of course. Slowly knew I wasn't actually ready to walk. For one thing, he knows that I'm getting a little creaky in the joints.

Slowly turned to my publishers, slowly. "We'll stay," he said. "For the time being."

My publishers nodded. Then they started talking about why it's difficult for a publishing house to give an author even a 10 percent royalty, considering how much publishers have to spend on, say, advertising and promotion.

"Wait a minute!" I said. "I know better than that." I pushed my chair back, just enough to make Slowly reach out toward me. I told my publishers that they could simply do what Newt Gingrich's publishers did: raise a hundred grand or so in advertising and promotion money from my supporters.

"Your supporters?" my publishers said. "Which supporters are those?"

I glanced over at Slowly. He didn't look as if he wanted to pursue that. Instead, he asked my publishers what kind of sales they were anticipating. He asked them politely. That was also a piece of strategy, you might say: He didn't want to encourage them to remind us that my previous book had sold like poisoned hot cakes.

They reminded us that my previous book had sold like poisoned hot cakes.

"Hold it right there!" I said, pushing back my chair just a tiny bit. I told my publishers that the problem with the marketing of the previous book was their failure to use bulk sales. Picking up the House ethics committee report, I pointed out some bulk sales that Jim Wright's publishers had managed to make—to the National Association of Realtors, for instance, and to the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association and to the unfortunately named but presumably literary-minded Fertilizer Institute. "The trouble with you people," I said, "is that you persist in selling books one at a time."

My publishers said they didn't think the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association would be terribly interested in my new book. Then they asked if I had thought about trying to spice up my first chapter a bit with some old high-school graduation speeches.

"C'mon, Slowly, let's vacate the premises," I said. I would have pushed my chair back, but I was almost up against the wall as it was. I was going to say we'd try Wright's publishers, but I couldn't think of the name; what kept coming to mind was Pork Barrel Press.

Slowly managed to put his hand on my arm, although the stretch nearly caused him to fall out of his chair. "O.K.," he said to my publishers. "We accept the 15 percent, but not a penny less."

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# Minimalism

EDWARD SOREL

1913 GERTRUDE STEIN WRITES "SUSIE ASADO"
SWEET SWEET SWEET SWEET SWEET TEA.
SUSIE ASADO.
SWEET SWEET SWEET SWEET SWEET TEA.
SUSIE ASADO.
SUSIE ASADO WHICH IS A TOLD TRAY SURE.
1952 JOHN CAGE'S 4'3" IS PERFORMED FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE MUSICIAN SITS WITH HIS INSTRUMENT (ANY ONE WILL DO) FOR FOUR MINUTES AND THIRTY-THREE SECONDS WITHOUT PLAYING A NOTE.
1962 GREGORY PECK WINS THE "BEST ACTOR" AWARD FROM THE MOTION PICTURE ACADEMY.
1935 THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ACQUIRES A CANVAS BY KAZIMIR MALEVICH IN WHICH ONE SQUARE OF WARM WHITE IS PAINTED ON A BACKGROUND OF COLD WHITE. IT IS CALLED "WHITE ON WHITE."
1989 GEORGE BUSH ASSUMES THE OFFICE OF PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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# MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

You try everything—historical research, journalistic exposé, rational debate, silver bullets, garlic, stakes driven through the heart at the crossroads at midnight—and nothing seems to work. The screams of the victims die away, the waters of the swamp recede, the count moves back into his castle and Kissinger Associates are back in town.

Even *The New York Times*, normally an echo chamber for the snarls and chuckles of the mad doctor, published a worried piece the other day about the Bush Administration's permeability. There is Lawrence Eagleburger, stepping in as James Baker's deputy after four years as president of the famous consulting firm. Say hi to Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser after six years as vice chair of the same operation. And here is Peter Rodman, "special assistant" to Ronald Reagan and now acting N.S.C. counselor. As personal assistant to HAK (the index name assigned to Kissinger in the second volume of his own deceitful and self-serving memoirs), Rodman planted hostile reviews of books by HAK's critics in magazines such as *The American Spectator*. From his post as director of research at Kissinger Associates, Rodman moved to State Department policy planning under Reagan. HAK's firm charges $200,000 at a minimum to its clients, which include Fiat, Volvo, I.T.T., American Express and Daewoo, as well as Coca-Cola and, for a change of pace, Anheuser-Busch. In his financial disclosure statement, Brent Scowcroft failed to mention his post as vice chair of the firm until he had been asked three times, and then "misstated" the extent of his holdings and compensation. He also once headed a Commission on Strategic Forces for Ronald Reagan, which recommended "continued development and the deployment of the Trident II (D-5) missile as rapidly as possible." The Trident is made by Lockheed, for whom Scowcroft was then a consultant. It is absurd to call this sort of thing a "conflict of interest" or a "revolving door." It is a *harmony* of interest, which expresses the solidarity of a class.

One of the privileges of a ruling class is that it can treat public property as private. This is what Kissinger has done with the archives of his time in power. Let me give a micro example. My old friend Elias Demetracopoulos, a courageous Greek journalist who successfully warded off the Nixon gang's attempts to frame and deport him, has been trying for years to get hold of the documents relating to his case. He possesses signed statements from F.B.I. Director William Webster and C.I.A. chief William Casey confessing that they have "no derogatory information" on him in their files. But an N.S.C. computer index dated December 18, 1970, refers cryptically to "Mr Demetracopoulos death in Athens prison." The date is consistent with the time at which the Greek military junta was trying to kidnap Elias and return him to Greece. He is understandably keen to know who was discussing him in those terms. His interest is whetted further by a briefing paper presented to President Ford in October 1974. This document refers to a "trace paper" about Demetracopoulos, to "the derogatory blind memo" and "the long Kissinger memo" on him, which are said to have been "left with General Skowcroft" [*sic*].

Kissinger has refused to answer detailed and repeated letters from Demetracopoulos's lawyers concerning the whereabouts of these papers. He removed all his job-related documents from the White House before Congress mandated that the National Archives take hold of the Nixon Administration records, and has since parlayed this trove into a windfall from his memoirs. Why should one individual's pursuit of justice be allowed to put a crimp in this magnificent style? Why should Kissinger and Scowcroft and those who pay them have to put up with any rude or intrusive questioning? After all, it *is* their country.

Interested as he still is in the secret "reasons of state" discussion that may have condemned him to death, Elias Demetracopoulos spends a fair amount of time in the Nixon archives. Recently, he handed me a wonderful item which he had unearthed there. It shows the culture of journalistic deference at its most efflorescent:

> Dear Mr. President:
>
> Herewith the first run off the press of a book called THE MAKING OF THE PRESIDENT—1968, whose hero is Richard M. Nixon.
>
> There will, of course, later be another suitably bound special edition for the President of the United States. But the words will be the same; and I want this first day's run in your hands as soon as possible.
>
> The book goes to you with my great thanks for your help. I have had few somersaults of emotion greater than in the years 1967-1968. My previous reporting of Richard Nixon must, I know, have hurt. I felt that way then. If I feel differently now it is not that there is a new Richard Nixon or a new Teddy White, but that slowly truths force their way on all of us. The campaign that this book tries to describe was the campaign of a man of courage and of conscience; and the respect it wrung from me—which I hope is evident—surprised me week by week as I went along.
>
> I hope I have not abused your confidences. Much of our conversations I have left out hoping that I can use them later, when the edge of immediacy is off, in the campaign of Richard Nixon in 1972. I so much want to start the next book with our talk in Indianapolis, as you began to describe the administration you wanted to create and the style you wanted to give it; then, run through the conversations at the Pierre Hotel and the White House as you were shaping the administration; and finally, in 1972 describe a campaign in a country which the President has brought to peace and in which he has stilled hates.
>
> There's so much difference between being a reporter and being a citizen. A reporter owes a duty to the "public", and tells it as he sees it which sometimes hurt [*sic*]. But a citizen owes a duty to the country; and the President describes the duty. I am both a reporter and a citizen. And this President can also call on me as a friend.
>
> Sincerely yours,
> Teddy White

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# BOOKS & THE ARTS.

## The Truth About *Perestroika*

BORIS KAGARLITSKY

SOVIET FREEDOM. *By Anthony Barnett, with Nella Bielski. Hutchinson Radius. 368 pp. $27.95.*

REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE: Where Is the Soviet Union Going? *By Tariq Ali. Century Hutchinson and Verso. 255 pp. $29.95. Paper $9.95.*

*(Anthony Barnett's book is distributed in the United States by W.W. Norton; Tariq Ali's book will be available in a Verso edition this fall.)*

The Soviet Union is too important to be left to Sovietologists. This precept is central to *Revolution From Above*, by Tariq Ali, but it could just as easily be applied to *Soviet Freedom*, by Anthony Barnett, which was published in London six months earlier. The two books almost beg for comparison. Both authors are radicals; neither had studied Soviet society before. Tariq Ali had edited a very interesting collection of materials on Stalinism, but as a British socialist he was interested in the overall theoretical and international aspects of the problem. Meanwhile, in these books both Ali and Barnett are mainly concerned with nothing less than the everyday political life of my country.

Who in the West could have imagined something like this five or six years ago? When many authors of books about the Soviet Union touched on politics, they set about describing the functioning of various official agencies or providing biographies of Politburo members. The study of politics came down to Kremlinology. Few people would have applied the phrase "political struggle" to the Soviet Union. The Western reader had an image of a hopelessly conservative and drearily bureaucratic society in which nothing happened for decades. All the greater, then, was the perplexity and ecstasy when new events started to occur and the process of reform charged ahead with dizzying speed.

Paradoxically, the more convinced the public in the West was that our society was hopelessly conservative, the more inclined it was to euphoria and wholly unrestrained exaggeration of the radicalism of any proclaimed Soviet reforms once it became clear that those were not fictions. People called it not liberalization but liberation. Every official decree was inevitably declared revolutionary, bold and progressive. Today even the censored official Soviet press sometimes offers more sober and critical analyses of current policy than the majority of serious Western publications. Misconceptions beget misconceptions. The Western public may have traded dark glasses for rose-tinted ones, but neither the right nor the left has come close to an understanding of the complex and possibly tragic processes under way in the Soviet Union.

Yet, good always comes out of bad. If not for the current universal fascination with the Soviet Union, probably neither Barnett nor Ali would have undertaken to travel around this "enigmatic country." Another thing in common is that both authors' interest in the country was piqued by *perestroika*. Further, as socialists, they inevitably connect the prospects for reform in the Soviet Union with the political struggle in the West. Ten or twenty years ago reference to the "Soviet experiment" only strengthened the arguments of the right by showing the uselessness of "socialist experiments." But now socialists can take pleasure in the news from Moscow. However it is happening, in the homeland of Stalinism they've begun to talk about socialism with a human face.

In this case Sovietology holds the losing hand. Didn't people representing this science present a generalized and schematic view of the Soviet Union in the West for many long years? Of course, Western authors have written many substantial books, especially on Soviet history (the works of Stephen F. Cohen, Moishe Levin and Alec Nove have had a great influence on Western historians). But the mass-produced works of dozens of rank-and-file Sovietologists of the 1970s and the "expert" newspaper commentaries are not likely to be of much interest now. It's not surprising that people like Barnett and Ali wanted to spend time in the Soviet Union themselves, to see everything with their own eyes and then share what they saw.

Of course, they don't rely solely on their own impressions. From the very first pages of their books it is clear that these authors—careful readers of *Moscow News* and *The Guardian*—examine news reports that may go unnoticed by other authors. Unfortunately, the limited circulation of *Moscow News* makes it nearly as inaccessible to the average Soviet reader as *The Guardian* or *The Nation*, and many events that I witnessed were strikingly different from the way they were depicted in even the most liberal issues of *Moscow News* or *Ogonyok*. But in the end these are the journals that are used to judge the development of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, since in a society traditionally based on monopoly and centralism the monopoly on liberalism is guarded with particular zeal. Although Barnett and Ali are dependent on official sources of information, they aren't any more so than the average Soviet citizen. This makes their view of Soviet society sufficiently objective, albeit not always sufficiently analytical.

Barnett's *Soviet Freedom* is written impressionistically. Short chapters are devoted to a single event, personal observation or serious political issue. The descriptions of hotels or street scenes are given almost as much space as discussions of strikes and nascent worker activism. Ali tries to be more systematic in *Revolution From Above*, tracking the sources of events, citing social interests and the ideological orientation of the opposing sides. But he cannot resist sharing his personal impressions either. Both authors characteristically find a similarity between what they saw in the West in the 1960s and what is going on in Soviet society today. Such comparisons appear more and more often in Western literature. (I can't help but gloat that when I first noted this in the pages of the *New Left Review* in 1987, I was assailed for confusing desire with reality.)

Barnett's view of events is the view of an intellectual who made contacts with Moscow intellectuals. Ali's view is primarily that of an activist who likewise found people similar to himself in Moscow—and in unexpectedly great numbers. There were rallies on Pushkin Square in the summer of 1988, run-ins with the

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*Boris Kagarlitsky is a leader of the socialist reform movement in the Soviet Union and the author of* The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State From 1917 to the Present *(Verso). Translated from the Russian by Michele A. Berdy.*

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militia, heated discussions about the salvation of humanity and the fate of socialism. A clear tendency toward anarchy and a keen need for discipline, the Leninist phraseology of liberals and the authoritarian leanings of the champions of universal liberation—this is hardly new for someone who lived through 1968. But it in no way repeats what has already occurred. Events are moving at a different pace and the stakes are far higher. In April 1989 the young men and women at Tbilisi University personally experienced the difference between the Latin Quarter and Prospekt Rustavelli. The rapidly growing bitterness, the increasingly difficult situation in the economy, the skeptical and self-critical analysis of left ideologists—all have little in common with the lovely European dream of 1968. There is no time at Moscow University to write beautiful slogans about love and revolution on the walls. The blood spilled in Sumgait and Tbilisi is clearly not the last. People speak of revenge more often at rallies, and movement activists know that no one guarantees their safety. Discussions of "revolution from above" and "Soviet freedom" are likely to be regarded as bitter irony. Both revolution and freedom still lie ahead—in the best of circumstances.

That Ali's book was published six months after Barnett's is its main advantage. Both authors are most concerned with the formulation of a civil society and the growth of political identity, but Ali clearly had more material. The Nineteenth Communist Party Conference took place in the interim between the publication of these two books in Britain. The election of delegates, which was conducted by purely bureaucratic methods, set off a powerful movement of protest in various parts of the country. Huge crowds of demonstrators appeared on the streets of Kuibyshev and Yaroslavl. Mass meetings were held in Omsk and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. In the non-Russian republics a situation that had already been quite tense quickly grew worse.

The public upsurge of the summer of 1988 gave rise to the People's Front movement. In the Baltic republics the movement has been primarily national in character, while in Moscow, Leningrad and the Russian provinces the People's Front has appeared as a coalition of the democratic left.

All of these events are reflected in Ali's account. As a Marxist, however, he doesn't limit himself to listing facts but rather tries to give a historical explanation for them. The heroes of the book are not simply people demonstrating in the streets of Moscow (heroes such as movement activists Mikhail Maliutin or Andrei Babushkin, who are still not very well known in the West). The author of *Revolution From Above* cites representatives of various ideological trends: left radicals, liberals, technocrats, conservatives and neo-Stalinists. He tries to give the reader a sense of the body of these people's ideas and how they took shape. In this sense Ali's book is a valuable traveler's guide to the ideological labyrinth of *perestroika*.

Barnett's work is to some extent already out-of-date. This isn't his fault—events have progressed too rapidly. Barnett gives the Western reader a sense of the Moscow political and cultural atmosphere in 1987, Tariq Ali writes about 1988—and here we are in 1989.

Unfortunately, only some of the two British travelers' predictions and conclusions have been borne out by the unfolding events. Although they are trying to get away from the clichés of Sovietology, they don't always succeed, often becoming captives of the very myths they wish to refute. Neither author believes in the myth of the totally controlled and completely centralized Soviet society, for instance. But their sense of the transformations conducted from above is to a large degree a continuation of this myth of Sovietology, which has merely been modified to suit the new circumstances. Instead of seeing an elemental, spontaneous process completely out of control, the vortex of a crisis, they still believe in the wisdom of reform. They are ready to blame conservative forces when transformations are not successful, without considering that the changes were, from the outset, a profoundly conservative attempt to re-establish control over an economy and society that was slipping out of control. They mistakenly identify the core of the unfolding changes as radical reform, though these changes had been predetermined by the urgency and tragic crisis gripping the country.

In reality, there has been no comprehensive reform in the economy or even in the political system. Everyone who has studied the legislation passed and political decisions made from 1986 to 1989 is amazed above all by how little has been accomplished. Many new documents are far from liberal. The law on elections and the decrees on special military units, on rallies and on demonstra-

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tions have made Soviet legislation much worse than it was even during the Brezhnev years. Stories on the failures of economic reform have become commonplace in the official press. The most astounding thing about *perestroika* is how much is changing in society despite the total failure of initiatives of reform from above. The greatest sensation of the spring 1989 elections was not the successes of the left in Moscow—where one of the coordinators of the People's Front, Sergei Stankevich, was unexpectedly turned into a key figure in the progressive deputy bloc—but the landslide defeat of official candidates in Leningrad, candidates who had no competition in elections conducted by the old rules!

As Western observers continue to extol wise reforms, we see that the complete failure of moderate reform attempts has opened the way to uncontrolled elemental processes. What do we have, a prerevolutionary situation or a prereactionary period? It may very well be both.

The course of events makes us delay our optimistic predictions. The Western public, which has begun to believe in these new myths of Sovietology, has another disappointment in store. But pessimistic prophesies would probably not be trusted, and in any case the country will never be the same again. The British travelers Barnett and Ali sensed this on the streets of Moscow. I can confirm that the same has been felt in Irkutsk, Sverdlovsk, Kiev and many other cities, at every end of this enormous land. The question of whether the reforms are irreversible is a question of whether people are willing to fight for their freedom. We saw that they were when 35,000 Muscovites responded to the appeal of the People's Front in March by attending a rally for the radical political leader Boris Yeltsin and the candidates of the "progressive bloc."

Perhaps my most vivid impression of those days was the work of the group organizing the rally. The young people wearing the Front's blue armbands were able to maintain order in the crowd, pass out fliers and listen to the speakers. These people don't believe a single word without thinking it over, but they are willing to fight for what they believe in. They already know what freedom is and they won't give up their rights. Because they can no longer live any other way.

You ask where the guarantees of irreversible democratization are? One is in these people. □


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# Of Thee Ah Sing

JOHN LEONARD

TRIPMASTER MONKEY: His Fake Book. *By Maxine Hong Kingston. Alfred A. Knopf. 340 pp. $19.95.*

We won't get much of anywhere with *Tripmaster Monkey* unless we understand that Maxine Hong Kingston is playing around like a Nabokov with the two cultures in her head. In *Ada*, by deciding that certain wars, which were lost, should have been won, Nabokov rearranged history to suit himself. There were Russians all over North America, making trilingual puns. This odd world was a parody of Russian novels. In *Tripmaster Monkey*, America in the 1960s is looked at through the lens of a half-dozen Chinese novels, most of them sixteenth century. I will fall on this sword in a minute.

First, a disabusing. What everybody seems to have wanted from Kingston, after a decade of silence, is another dreambook, like *The Woman Warrior.* Or another history lesson, like *China Men.* Anyway: more magic, ghosts, dragonboats, flute music from the savage lands. Never mind that she's earned the right to write about whatever she chooses, and if she chooses to write about looking for Buddha in the wild, wild West, we'd better pay attention because she's smarter than we are. Nevertheless, the reviewers are demanding more memoir. Where's the female avenger?

Instead of the female avenger, we get Wittman Ah Sing, a 23-year-old fifth-generation Chinese-American male, Cal English major, playwright and draft dodger. This Wittman, singing himself in Berkeley and San Francisco in the early 1960s, in the parenthesis between the countercultures of beat and hippie, will lose a job in the toy section of a department store and apply for unemployment; read Rilke aloud to startled passengers on a bus and look in the woods for his abandoned grandmother; act up and act out. He wants to be an authentic American, but America won't let him. Racist jokes enrage him, but he also worries that a rapprochement of black and white might still exclude his very own yellow, which color determines his wardrobe, his slick performance. He may or may not be legally married to Tana the folksinger/office worker, but she's too "gringo Anglo" for him; she's not Nanci Lee, who "represented Cal at the intercollegiate (Chinese) beauty-personality-good-grades contest at UCLA." He's done time at a dog pound, and among DNA biologists, and they all look alike: "A liberal-arts education is good for knowing how to look at anything from an inquisitive viewpoint, to shovel shit and have thoughts." He's into drugs, movies, comic books and modern masters. He wants to be, if not Lenny Bruce or Allen Ginsberg, at the very least "the first bad-jazz China Man bluesman of America." And what he'll do, like Judy Garland, is put on a show in his garage, a kind of Cantonese *Götterdämmerung.*

In other words: Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield, Augie March, maybe even Stephen Dedalus and probably Abbie Hoffman. Wittman is a "tripmaster," a friendly guide to the stoned in their travels through acid-time. But he's also, and this is where it gets tricky, an incarnation of the Monkey King in Wu Ch'eng-en's sixteenth-century *Journey to the West*, a kind of Chinese *Pilgrim's Progress.* He's the rebel/mischief-maker who helped bring back Buddha's Sutras from India; the shape-changer (falcon, koi fish, cormorant) who annoyed Laotse by eating the peaches of the Immortals, even though he hadn't been invited to their party. The weeklong play this Monkey stages to finish off Wittman's "fake book" is nothing less than a reenactment of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a kind of Chinese *Terry and the Pirates.* And the actors he press-gangs into service for that play—everybody he knows in California, including his Flora Dora showgirl mother, his "aunties" and a kung fu gang—are nothing less than symbolic stand-ins for the 108 bandit-heroes of *Water Margin*, a kind of Chinese Robin Hood—enemies of a corrupt social order, hiding out in a wetlands Sherwood Forest, like Chairman Mao in misty Chingkangshan or the caves of Yenan.

This Wittman is stoned on books. Imagine one culture, ours, reimagined in the classic literature of another's—late imperial Ming—so much older, no less bloody. Sixties grandiosity!

A word here about language. What so excited readers of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* was that shiver of the exotic, the Other's static cling. It was as if we'd eavesdropped on a red dwarf and picked up these alien signals, this legend stuff, from an ancestor culture that

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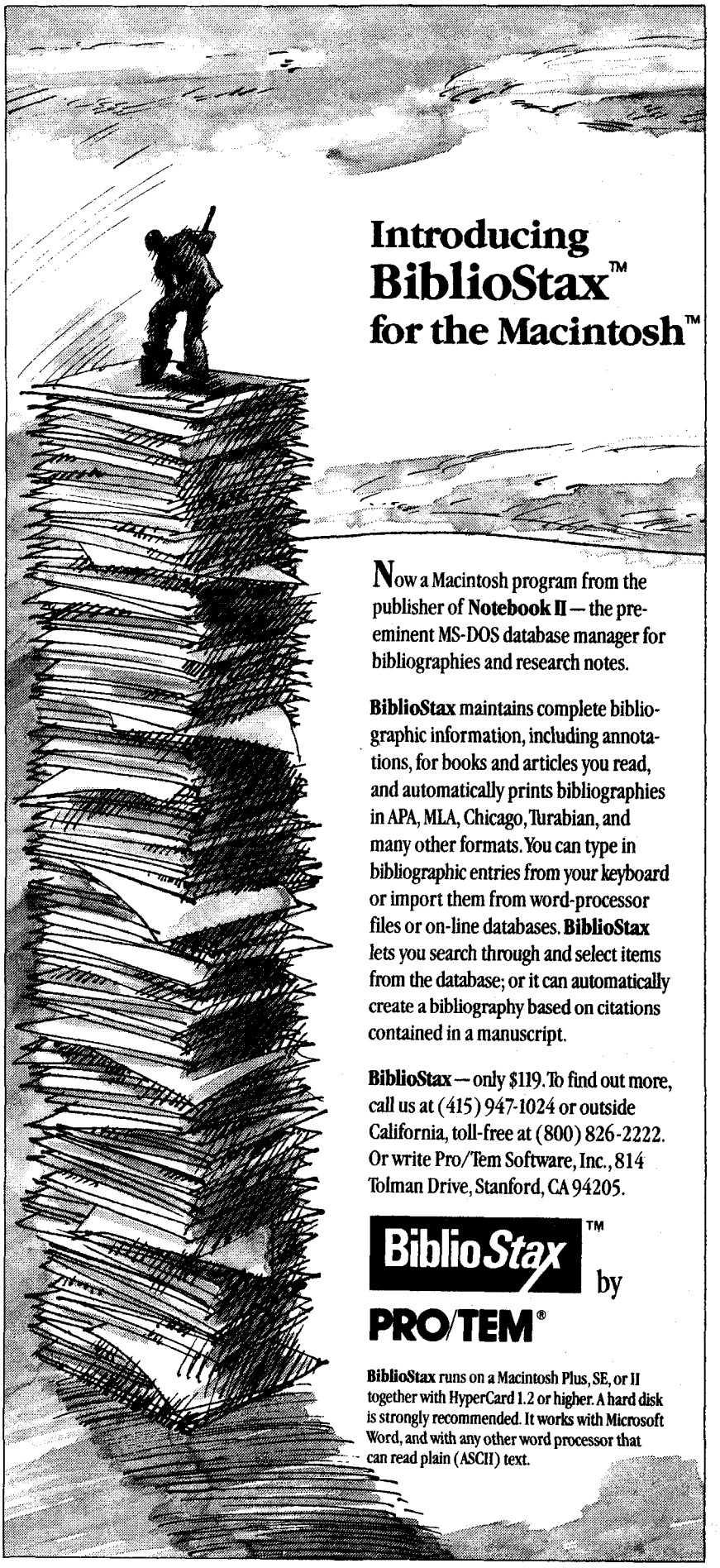
despised its female children, that bound their feet and threw them down wishing wells and killed their names. Kingston achieved such a shiver by a sneaky art—disappearing into people who couldn't think in English, and translating for them. She had to invent an American language commensurate with their Chinese meanings. In the way that Toni Morrison arrived at all the transcendence of *Beloved* by stringing together little words *just so*, rubbing up their warmth into a combustion, Kingston dazzled us by pictographs, by engrams.

She made it look easy, but imagine the price. She denied and abolished herself. There wasn't room for a grown-up Maxine in her portraits of a mother who devoured her children and a father who buried wine bottles upside-down in the garden so that "their bottoms made a path of sea-color circles." This grown-up Maxine, after all, was a Cal English major just like Wittman; a reader of Rilke and Proust, Pound, Joyce and Eliot, the original Whitman and his grandchild Ginsberg, Charles Olson and Gary Snyder and Brother Antoninus. From these books dissolved in brain, from a slang of be-ins and love-ins and trippings-out in the psychedelic 1960s, from radical chitchat and the calisthenics of Left Coast Zen, an adult Kingston had fashioned a language of her own. But she'd no place to put it in her first two books. Like Bak Goong in *China Men*, forbidden to talk on the Hawaii sugar-cane plantation, she shouted into a hole in the ground. To sing herself, she needed someone like the unbuttoned Wittman.

The result in *Tripmaster* is less charming but more exuberant. Instead of falling into pattern or turning on wheel—there's something inevitable about everything in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, something fated—this language bounces, caroms and collides; abrades and inflames. Instead of Mozart, Wittman's rock and roll.

Not that Kingston altogether trusts him. He babbles a lot. And he's just as much babbled at—by Mrs. Chew, who skins peaches, and by the upwardly mobile civil servant Lance Kamiyama and the downwardly mobile Yale Younger Poet who hides out in the bowels of the department store. If Wittman's the sort who asks in a restaurant, "Are you the one I can tell my whole life to?" he's also the sort to whom confiding strangers talk their stories about how the red fox got from China to Oakland or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what noodles with Jell-O tasted like on Angel Island. He has a philosophy. Sixties Digger-Buddhist: "Do something, even if it's wrong. . . . His understanding of Kierkegaard: To think up reasons why something would not work guarantees that it will not work. Never do feasibility studies. Get on with creation. Do the most difficult thing. Keep the means moral." And: "Do the right thing by whoever crosses your path. Those coincidental people are your people."

But his paranoia is also vintage 1960s: Through his "metaphor glasses," poor and superserious psych major Judy turns into a blue-black boar, with "a blue-red tongue showing between silver teeth, and two ivory sword tusks." Seeing inside Tana's head, he's beside himself: "He should never have taken drugs. Can't tell the gods' chimeras from freaks of my own." At a Kamiyama party he wonders, "What if Chubby Checker does not mean us well? What if Chubby Checker is up to no good?"

Wittman's too easily wowed. He's a one-man *I Ching*—"a book and also a person dressed in yellow," jumping from "reality to reality like quantum physics." He needs watching. And a female narrator—usually affectionate, always ironic, occasionally annoyed—looks down on him. Don't ask me how I know the narrator's female. I just do. She's as old as China, and remembers what happened in five dynasties and three religions. She's also foreseen the future: America will lose the war in Vietnam, which Wittman's dodging; the 1960s will be sadder than he hopes; feminism's in the works. She explains things Wittman has no way of knowing: "Gary Snyder had gone to Japan to meditate for years, and could now spend five minutes in the same room with his mother." And: "Ho Chi Minh's favorite reading was *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and it's a text at West Point too. Uncle Ho and Uncle Sam were both getting their strategy and philosophy from Grandfather Gwan, god of war." Though seldom a bully, she does at one point tell Wittman to shut up.

It's a nice tension. Wittman is the ultimate innocent himself, the last romantic, all virtue and passion and energy and funk. He will go up like a balloon in every weather: "They hung over the balcony and watched the skaters going around. If we run downstairs and rent skates, could we be Orlando and the Russian princess zipping on the frozen Thames above the apple woman in the deep ice? Wittman, the fool for books, ought to swear off reading for a while, and find his own life."

His watcher and keeper is amused; knows better. Fond as she may be of Wittman, attached, he's less a balloon to her than a kite. (The Chinese, remember, invented the kite and the wheelbarrow: Yang and Yin.) She pulls his string. Having seen our future, she's aware that Wittman's play won't end the war and save the world. It won't even assimilate him into America, or America into Wittman. (Either assimilation's a two-way street or it's a sellout.) But without his innocence and excess, there would be no way at all of imagining alternative futures: "But, Uncle, we bad. Chinamen freaks. Illegal aliens. Outlaws. Outcasts of America. But we make our place—this one community house for benevolent living. We make theater, we make community."

Now about that play. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is required reading for every literate Chinese child. (If you don't already know this stuff, you probably wonder if you need to. Only if you want

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to get a tenth as much out of Kingston's novel as she's put into it.) It glorifies a third-century revolt of Liu Pei and his mentor, Chu-ko Liang, against the military dictatorship of Ts'ao Ts'ao. Chinese have staged one version or another of it in theaters and opera houses in America ever since the railroad and Gold Rush days. Like Mao's favorite, *Water Margin*, it's a treasure-trove of stories, "chock full," as Kenneth Rexroth pointed out,

> of ghosts, innkeepers who make hamburgers of their guests, giants of superhuman strength, beautiful women in distress, wily intellectuals, crafty merchants, tireless lechers, heroic gluttons, sensitive scholars, arson, rape, murder, hairbreadth escapes, pitiful deaths. . . . To produce something like it would require the collaboration of Rabelais, Petronius, Defoe, and Dickens, with, I suppose, details from I. Babel.

It's not the best Chinese novel. (That's probably *Dream of the Red Chamber*, about a Bodhisattva in the making, from which Kingston also borrows in *Tripmaster* for a killer game of mah-jongg; like the Bodhisattva, Wittman must escape the domination of his female relatives, the hidden matriarchy at the heart of Chinese society.) But it's the most popular. And it's a very Grimm fairy tale. In it, all the good guys die.

This, of course, isn't good enough for Wittman. As well as the god of warriors, Gwan was the god of actors, writers, gamblers and travelers. Wittman will rewrite *Three Kingdoms*. His play is a "fake war." He'll substitute his theater for all the wars in the history of the world. From Monkey King and Havoc Monster, Pure Green Snake and White Bone Demoness, Dwarf Tiger and Dry Land Water Beast, American movies and Peking opera, vaudeville and puppets and brothel music, fireworks and kung fu, he will ordain a Peaceable Kingdom: "Night mirages filled the windows reflecting and magnifying—a city at war and carnival. All aflare and so bright that we understand: why we go to war is to make explosions and lights, which are more beautiful than anything."

And this Peaceable Kingdom will include his "coincidental people." Just listen:

> The sheriff will surely come soon, to stop the show with a cease-and-desist-disturbing-the-peace order. Jail us for performing without a permit, like our brave theatrical ancestors, who were violators of zoning ordinances; they put on shows, they paraded, and they raised chickens within city limits. They were flimflammers of tourists, wildcat miners, cigar makers without the white label, carriers of baskets on poles, cubic air breathers, miscegenists, landsquatters and landlords without deeds, kangaroo jurists, medical and legal practitioners without degrees, unconvertible pagans and heathens, gamblers with God and one another, aliens unqualifiable for citizenship, unrelated communalists and crowders into single-family dwellings, dwellers and gamblers in the backs of stores, restauranteurs and launderers who didn't pass health inspection, droppers of garbage into other people's cans, payers and takers of less than minimum wage . . . look-alikes of japs and Viet Cong, unlicensed manufacturers and exploders of fireworks. Everybody with aliases. More than one hundred and eight outlaws.

Well, the hippies wanted to be Indians. Why not Chinese, instead? And what, after all, was the trial of the Chicago Seven but Wittman's sort of theater? And wouldn't it have been something if the Quakers, Women's Strike for Peace, Martin Luther King Jr. and the vegetarians had prevailed? Instead, the garrison


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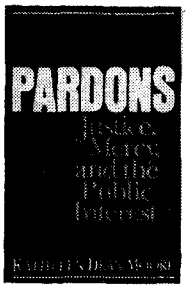


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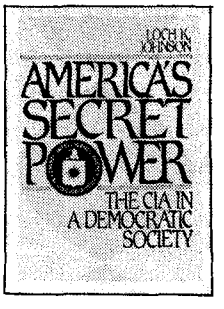


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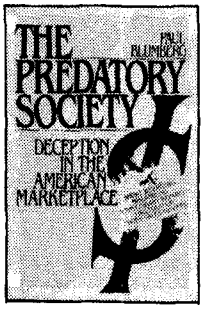


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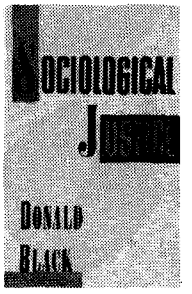


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state, which had most of the violence, stopped this show, and the left regressed into little-league Leninism—a tantrum of cadres, Weatherpeople, Baader-Meinhof. And the rest is Heavy Metal. "It must be," says poor Wittman, "that people who read go on more macrocosmic and microcosmic trips—Biblical god trips. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake* trips. Non-readers, what do they get? (They get the munchies.)"

You can stop looking for the Novel of the Sixties. It took 3,000 years on its journey to the West. But here are the peaches and the Sutras. □

# Climbing Jacobs's Ladder

MARTIN GOTTLIEB

THE LIVING CITY. *By Roberta Brandes Gratz. Simon and Schuster. 414 pp. $21.95.*

CITY: Rediscovering the Center. *By William H. Whyte. Doubleday. 386 pp. $24.95.*

In writing their two recent books about American cities, William H. Whyte and Roberta Brandes Gratz each seemed to be standing on the same pair of broad shoulders. These belong to Jane Jacobs, whose classic urban texts of the 1960s, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and *The Economy of Cities*, at once challenged every expert assumption about what makes cities work and affirmed every gut feeling that city-dwellers had about why they liked living where they did. By embracing the street and the neighborhood at a time when they were being bulldozed and paved over, by championing and deciphering the urban hodgepodge at a time when planners were striving for an allegedly rational order, and by finding value in a mix of activities that included industries considered dirty and passé, Jacobs confirmed the value of the polyglot city and, more than that, the jumble of human engagement.

While Gratz, in *The Living City*, owes as much to Jacobs as does Whyte, it is Whyte's link, in his book *City*, that is most affecting. Of the city, Whyte concludes, "human congress is the genius of the place, its reason for being, its great marginal edge." As the editor who first published Jacobs's writing on cities more than thirty years ago, his work for the past quarter-century can be seen as an outgrowth of Jacobs's credo in *Death and Life*: "The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behavior of cities is, I think, to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as is possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them."

Whyte has done just that with Super 8 and speed-frame film, sun charts, rulers, head counts and, above all, with his own eyes. The results are well known. He tells us where people like to kiss (in the middle of the sidewalk), where they sit in plazas (on seats they can move into the sunlight), how they say goodbye on hectic streets (at great length) and where they like to hang out (around other people). For Whyte, streets are "rivers of life," and it is our good fortune that this observer possesses so many of the qualities of his subject matter at its best. His writing is elegant, humorous and filled with passion and joyful discovery. For those who have been following Whyte for years, the book will read as a graceful, committed progress report on a career of watching—in its richest and, indeed, most loving sense.

Gratz's book makes many of the same arguments as Whyte's but with the sort of earnest diligence that presents the heroes as "tough-talking, no-nonsense" guys and the heroines as "sharp, peppery" gals. The villains are usually unnamed "experts" looking to undermine neighborhood fabrics, downtown shopping areas, historic preservation efforts and populist action. The underlying argument comes to life in the persons of W.W. Law, who nurtured his lower-middle-class neighborhood in Savannah, Georgia; Harry De Rienzo, who did the same for his abjectly poor neighborhood in the South Bronx; and Ron Shiffman and Brian Sullivan of Brooklyn's Pratt Center, who have been spreading the gospel for years. Their lesson is that true citizen empowerment, geared toward building on the strengths of existing neighborhoods and streets, is the surest way to create living cities. *The Living City*

*Martin Gottlieb covered development and neighborhood issues for the New York* Daily News *and* The New York Times. *He was formerly editor of* The Village Voice.

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offers various nuggets, including one of the savviest-ever analyses of how to harness the positive aspects of gentrification, but mostly it makes the case for small, incremental actions that encourage the supposedly "natural" development of cities. Neighborhood activists across the country and citizens battling shopping malls and the like will find advice, kindred souls and solace here.

But, a quarter-century after Jacobs first staked this ground, it is fair to ask whether the vision offered by her and her progeny is a whole one. Would a more complete account of urban life call in some significant respects for just the sort of massive rebuilding projects—with important changes stemming from twenty-five years of reflection and knowledge—that drove Jacobs up the wall to begin with? Put bluntly, is there a place in the city for the large urban renewal project? Don't these buildings often speak to the needs and desires of their residents, even though they fly in the face of almost everything the urban texturists think is proper?

In answering yes, I think it useful to separate the twin purposes served over the years by Jacobs's work and by Whyte's as well. Each has been analytic—serving as a corrective to anticity prejudices that often ran far ahead of fact and to the authoritarian thinking of government bureaucrats—and each has been celebratory, proclaiming the wonders of the most conventional aspects of city life at a time when they were under attack from all quarters. Those who sought to feel good about living in a big city from the late 1950s on got that feeling from Jacobs and Whyte.

But often their work seems too optimistic and divorced from the disturbing aspects of city life. To read Whyte's description of "Mr. Magoo," "The Witch" and "Tambourine Woman" is enjoyable if one puts it in context. He began to study these street people, idiosyncratic at best, when developers were using them as an excuse to lock up their public plazas. Whyte's point is that they were harmless, a colorful part of the urban panoply. Today, those observations seem far out-of-date. A woman who calls herself Billy Boggs has nudged aside Mr. Magoo.

Many city dwellers, particularly those in marginal neighborhoods or worse, live in places far more dangerous, anonymous, random and frightening than one might imagine in reading this body of work. Frequently, they live in apartments that were scandals when


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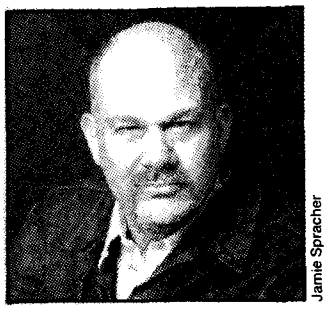
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Jacob Riis railed against them nearly a hundred years ago—apartments with crumbling walls and without bathrooms or heat. Gratz visited the Lower East Side, as she chronicles at the end of her book. She found it a bustling, animated neighborhood, resurgent on a wave of Chinese immigration. But to visit the apartments of many of these newcomers leaves a passer-through with a desire first to cry out and then to tear the damn places down.

Gratz dutifully cites all the housing projects, most famously Pruit Igo in St. Louis, that have literally been blown to bits after failing. But she doesn't mention that the waiting list for public housing in New York now contains 120,000 or so names and that the city's massive middle-income projects scarcely have a vacancy. (Lincoln Center, of course, is not residential. But as Gratz concedes somewhat grudgingly, it is another example of a project that people like, although by her criteria they shouldn't.)

Co-op City, the great white whale of urban renewal, comes in for its requisite bashing in her book. But if the choice is between Co-op City and Battery Park City, which Gratz lauds for enhancing the streets, give me the wide-open anomie of Co-op City anytime. Here is an active development of more than 50,000 lower-middle and middle-class residents that has hung together for more than twenty years in the face of real adversity. Battery Park City is in some ways an outrage—a government-sponsored development for the rich, often justified because its revenue stream is being channeled to housing for the poor. In midafternoon it provides a late 1980s Kafkaesque experience: the feeling of being trapped inside an architectural rendering in which there are few other moving things.

To understand the human impetus underlying Co-op City's overblown design, it is useful to go back again to Gratz's endpoint, the Lower East Side, where Grand Street is lined with that development's precursors, a string of cooperative housing units built by the garment unions over a thirty-year period. Their residents, of which I was one, are "proud," Gratz reports, and they speak of their buildings "lovingly." Why this should be the case when the buildings cut them off from neighborhood street life she doesn't make clear. The pride of place comes, I believe, from a sense of triumphing over a harsh environment that was built in greed, cynicism and racism before the turn of the century. In place of bleak tenements, with their dark, suffocating interiors, fire hazards and lack of plumbing and green space are some of the largest rooms in any postwar building, rooms abundant with light, air and space and that are affordable to postmen, printers and dress-cutters. Some of the most prevalent fears of life on the Lower East Side have been put to rest. There are no fires; there's always heat.

In place of a street that for all its activity was looked at with wariness and fear (for good reason—read the first few pages of Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* for a reminder of an earlier ghetto version of gang rape) are sheltered parks and lots of trees and grass. Through their unions, working in a hostile environment, people gained some degree of control over their lives. There is, as Gratz reports, "a heightened tension with the surrounding, but alienated neighborhood," though I doubt this has mostly to do with design. Rather, I would put the emphasis on the fact that blacks and Latinos were discriminated against for years when they applied for apartments.

This is not to say that these apartments are full answers to an urban dilemma. They are bittersweet tradeoffs, providing relatively safe harbors in a historically tough neighborhood at the price of a certain remove from the longtime flow of community life. For me and most of my friends growing up, there was never a question of where we lived. We could feel our generational roots in our streets. Yet, as co-op residents, for better or for worse, we also stood apart, observers of and sometimes venturers into the hubbub, mystery, novelty and danger of our surrounding streets. (Gratz found the streets relatively safe, and, thanks to the recent influx of stable Chinese families, they are. But you would have had to live there for the twenty years before that to know how dangerous they used to be.)

There is a footnote to this. A visitor to the East Side co-ops at this time of year will find the validity of the assumptions of Whyte, Jacobs and Gratz. Despite the semi-enclosed tree-lined parks, many an octogenarian chooses instead to find an old milk crate, lean up against the side of the supermarket and watch Grand Street's passing parade—the lure of the street is great and life-sustaining.

In the face of the dire shelter situation of millions, one can only hope that the massive housing development is not dead forever—and in New York City,

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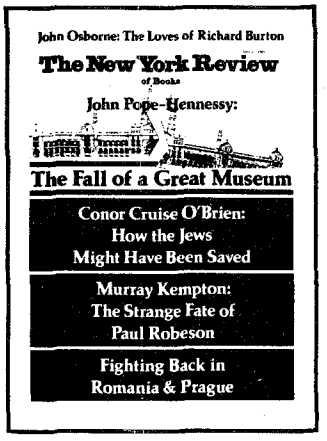


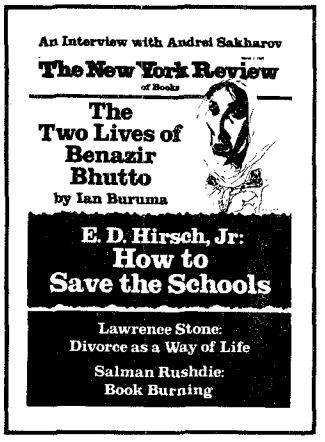


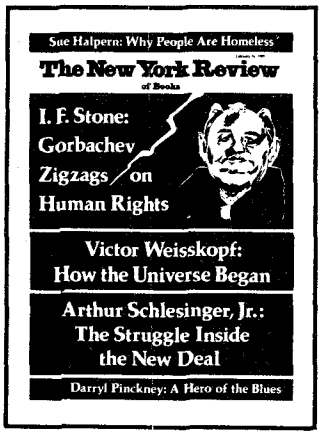


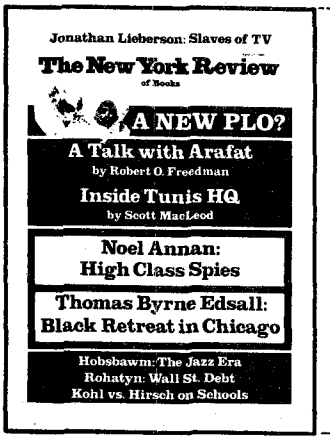


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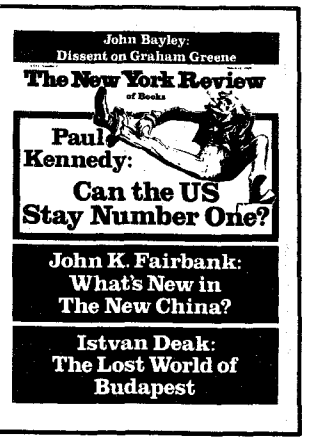


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thanks to the church-sponsored Nehemiah Project and the city's recent tenement reconstruction, funded in large part by Battery Park City, it may not be. Small, incremental change speaks only partially to the vast needs of this population. But if there is a next go-round, it ought to be influenced by many of the thoughts of those who hate urban renewal most. □

# Coming of Age in Toronto

LILLIAN S. ROBINSON

CAT'S EYE. *By Margaret Atwood. Doubleday. 446 pp. $18.95.*

One of Margaret Atwood's ancestors, Mary Webster of Connecticut, was hanged for witchcraft. This stunning historical fact came up in more than one review of the author's 1986 dystopian feminist novel, *The Handmaid's Tale.* But it was only from Atwood's essay "Witches" that I learned the equally significant sequel: Mary Webster *survived* what was meant to be her execution. Since she was alive when they cut her down from the gallows, and since the colonial legal system contained safeguards against double jeopardy, Mary Webster went free. But what did she do next, and for the rest of her life?

"If everyone thought she had occult powers before the hanging," Atwood speculates, "they were even more convinced of it afterwards." Did her astonishing survival carry the same conviction with Webster herself? Did she continue the practices that had already proved so menacing? Or did she find fresh areas of expression for her newly confirmed prowess? Walking away from one's own execution is an archetypally tough act to follow. So, in its (related) frame of reference, is *The Handmaid's Tale.* Can Margaret the Magician, Margaret the Medusa, Margaret the Man-eater—all characterizations Atwood was able to extract from her own scrapbooks more than ten years ago—cast her spell once more?

Most reviewers have emerged from their reading of *Cat's Eye* to report, whether in disappointment or relief, that the Witch of the North has failed to bring it off this time around. Instead of the nightmare of a whole future society, they tell us, Atwood gives us "merely" the present and the past of one woman artist. Words like *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* are bandied about as if they said it all, and the new ground she breaks, the *female* artist's life, is revealed as a tedious whine.

Well, I happen to be interested in the history that women of my generation have lived and made and, no, I don't find the narration of my own oppression boring. Not yet. So I approached the novel with my anticipation undimmed by what I'd read about it. But I certainly expected to find that it was a *Bildungsroman* and a *Künstlerroman* and was prepared, in my own review, to bandy Teutonisms with the best of them. In fact, however, *Cat's Eye* is something other—at once larger and smaller in design—than the record of a woman artist's life in our time. Unless, of course, Atwood is trying to suggest a new scale, more cosmic and more private, for the measurement of such a life.

*Cat's Eye* does provide the materials from which to document a single character's experience of growing into the particular woman and artist she is. Elaine Risley is a fairly successful painter who returns to Toronto for the opening of a retrospective of her work. Being back in her hometown, observing the city's evolution from dowdy provincialism to trendy cosmopolitanism, staying at her ex-husband's studio, visiting the women's gallery where the exhibit is to be held and surveying the content of her own surrealist-feminist paintings all trigger the memories that constitute the bulk of the novel. And these memories do add up to a devastating picture of what it meant to grow up female in the 1950s. Places and pictures also provide what amounts to a running commentary on human memory itself.

But it is not only time that distances Elaine from her own development as a female in postwar North American culture. There is a sense in which women's traditional destiny has always been more of a spectacle than an experience to her. For one thing, rigid sex roles and conventional relationships are an alien subject matter Elaine has to begin learning at age 8, when her family abandons a roving life of collecting botanical specimens in northern Ontario and moves to a Toronto suburb. Although on a cer-

*Lillian S. Robinson is Distinguished Visiting Professor of Women's Studies at San Diego State University.*

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tain level Elaine is so eager to fit in with the neighborhood girls that she mutilates her own personality in the attempt, she nonetheless views their ways with a bemused combination of detachment and agony, rather like an anthropologist captured and prepared for the table by cannibals she had thought would only be the subjects of study.

Thus, when the others gang up on Elaine for breaches of the code, she is docile. Only slowly does she come to understand that bullying is the real point, and the reader concludes, tentatively and I think erroneously, that Atwood is telling us a story about the forces that serve to divide women in a sexist society. The girls' cruelty culminates in the ultimate penalty, abandonment in a ravine said to be the haunt of mysteriously "bad men." But, although the ravine does become the scene, years later, of just the sort of rape-murder associated with a place where bad men lurk, the dangers Elaine encounters are falling through thin ice over a stream, losing her boots in the freezing water and coming down with the flu. The girls have arranged the worst fate they can imagine for her, but they are Elaine's only violators.

Just as it is some other girl who is raped and murdered in the ravine, it is another student of Elaine's art teacher and lover who hemorrhages after a self-induced abortion, an ex-girlfriend of her next lover who empties a pot of spaghetti on him while he is in bed with Elaine. Although Elaine suffers in her own marriage to that same philanderer, the most characteristic female anguish is always reserved for someone else. And Elaine's own most vividly realized pain is inflicted on her by other women. Throughout the novel, she mourns her failed relationship with her girlhood friend Cordelia; but the final breach had come when Elaine, the mother of a young child, was afraid to rescue Cordelia from a mental hospital and shelter her at home. Cordelia's threatened suicide has more reality than Elaine's own attempt, and part of my impatience with Elaine in her 1980s avatar is that, as she now looks for Cordelia in all the wrong places, it apparently never occurs to her that her friend might actually have gone through with her threat. Even when, at the novel's close, a drunken Elaine mentally cries out, "You're dead, Cordelia," she is saying something about herself, not about Cordelia.

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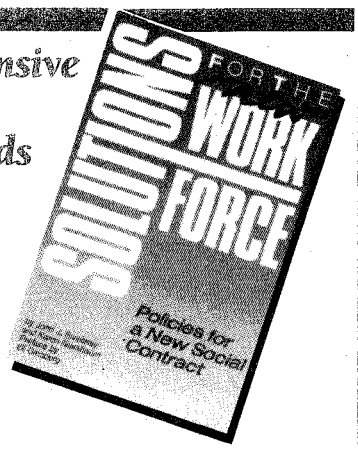


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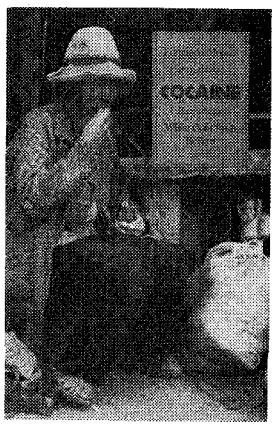


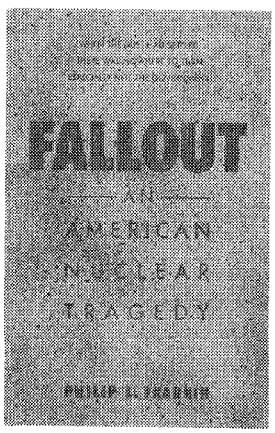


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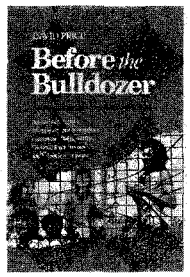


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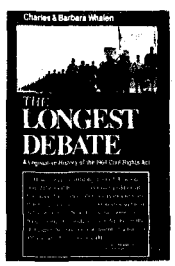


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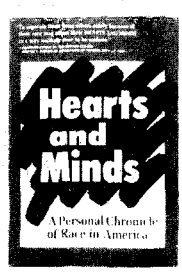


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into her own identity becomes a process, for her, of growing away, not only from their precept and example, but from women in general. Similarly, it is the feminist movement, represented here by a group of militant women artists, that helps Elaine to her first recognition as a painter, as well as to the elements of a raised consciousness. But we meet her in the 1980s as someone who has grown away from feminism—at least feminism as the social analysis of private suffering—and we find out in the course of the novel that she never really identified with the women's movement. Elaine takes a dim view of the hip young woman reporter who interviews her before the opening because she feels that no one now in her 20s can know what it was like to be a woman in *her* time. But it is actually Elaine Risley who has missed out on both extremes of female experience, the deepest pain and the highest sisterhood.

If that were all, *Cat's Eye* would still be chiefly a *Bildungsroman* and a *Künstlerroman*, and my problem as a reader would be whether my impatience with the heroine was strong enough to overpower my appreciation of the brilliantly realized details of life in the 1950s and 1960s. But the story of Elaine Risley's maturation as a woman and, for that matter, the story of those decades are situated in a larger context. In the conventional disclaimer where she specifies that this first person narrative is not an autobiography but a novel, Atwood also states that "space and time have been rearranged to suit the convenience of the book." It turns out to be significant that concepts as portentous as space and time are introduced into an explanation of how a work of fiction departs from a recitation of facts. On her acknowledgment page, she expresses her indebtedness to a number of well-known physicists and cosmologists whose subject matter she says she has "sideswiped" in this novel.

One of the intellectual turning points in *Cat's Eye* comes when Elaine's brother, while both are still teen-agers, interrupts one of their father's dinner-table lectures about species extinction on the earth, to point out the impermanence and insignificance of our sun itself in the greater order of things. Physics overcomes biology and ecology as the son out-machos the father. Elaine's quest—and, through it, Atwood's—is to bring the new, implicitly masculine, vision of space and time, of the multiplicity of dimensions, into the framework of her life as a woman and an artist. Thus, one of the newest paintings in her Toronto show is titled *Picoseconds*, while another is called *Unified Field Theory*. Both pictures use concepts from the world of physical and cosmological speculation to make sense of the artist's own history.

The books I love best do this: They connect the inner life of real people to the largest forces in the universe, illuminating complex relations between cosmos, consciousness and memory. This is why I reread Dante and Blake and won't give up on Doris Lessing. As the citation of two dead male big shots should indicate, a book that is a whole world is a rarity. It's rarer still to find one with a woman's inner life at its center. Insofar as *Cat's Eye* attempts such a project, it assumes an importance to me that is on a different plane from the (admitted) importance of a female *Bildungsroman*.

In order for the project to work, however, there has to be a level of experience that intervenes between the cosmic and the personal. Before reading *Cat's Eye*, I would have called that level "history." But history is not missing from Atwood's novel, although the intermediate term is. Perhaps what I mean is "politics," where that is understood as both the operation of social power and the analysis of the forces involved. Because we have to see the world through Elaine Risley's eyes and because those eyes are open considerably less wide than Atwood's own, the novel has a conceptual gap precisely where a bridge is called for.

World War II is not long over when Elaine's family moves to Toronto, and its cultural mark is still palpable. In the 1980s, Elaine tells the young interviewer that there is a division between those of us who remember that war and those who do not. Later, she observes that the war seems not to have ended after all but only to have fragmented and spread out into an ongoing series of smaller wars. But Atwood endows Elaine with no curiosity as to what those multiple wars have to do with, say, the changing economic and demographic face of Toronto, the condition of women or the destruction of the environment—although these are all pieces of history that do affect her. Even when Elaine's physicist brother is shot dead by terrorists, which brings the new war almost as close to home as it can get, Atwood deliberately keeps her ignorant of the hijackers' cause and even their faces. These people's history thus becomes as random as their tactics, and it looks as if it is Atwood who is saying

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that a Third World struggle (whatever it may happen to be) is without meaning—in general and in her narrative.

At the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the lecturer who is presenting that novel's manuscript memoir of a woman's life within a totalitarian nightmare utters some pompous footnotes instead of telling us what happened to Offred. After which he concludes the novel with a final piece of pedantry, asking, "Are there any questions?" Well yes, there were and there are. This next novel raises some I already had in mind and some new ones as well. *Cat's Eye* ends with Elaine mourning the future that she will never share with Cordelia—"two old women giggling over their tea"—and then turning to look at the stars in a moonless sky, describing them in terms informed by both art and astronomy: "It's old light," she concludes, "and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by." Maybe, but I'm still here in the political science lecture room with my hand raised and some unanswered questions on the tip of my tongue. □

# Learning to Love Imperialism

PETER TARR

IN OUR IMAGE: America's Empire in the Philippines. *By Stanley Karnow. Random House. 494 pp. $24.95.*

Ninety years ago a brutal war was fought for political control of the Philippines, one that pitted imperial America first against imperial Spain, and later against Filipinos who had declared an independent republic in 1898. When the fighting finally came to an end, in 1906, not only had Philippine independence been extinguished but so had between 250,000 and 1 million Filipinos—the higher figure representing one-seventh of the prewar population. Many of the dead were civilians, men, women and children who succumbed to disease during or after their internment in *reconcentrado* pens built by American soldiers.

What is most extraordinary about the Philippine-American war is not its cruelty (other wars have been equally savage), and not even that such cruelty was perpetrated by a nation that considered itself, then as now, the fountain of liberty (although this too is remarkable). What is most extraordinary is that ever since the war's conclusion, the vast majority of Filipinos have been disposed to admire and even profess love for American civilization.

How did this happen? Stanley Karnow attempts to tell the story in his recently published history, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines.* This is a peculiar and often misleading book. (It also served as the basis of a three-part PBS series, *The U.S. and the Philippines: In Our Image*, which aired in the New York City area in May.) It identifies dozens of egregious errors Americans have made in the islands over nine decades of meddling, yet Karnow offers only the timid conclusion that we Americans tried and failed to remold the Filipinos in our own idealized self-image.

Karnow is one of America's sentimental imperialists. He laments the errors of those who intervened, but not the act of intervention itself. Rather than criticize or condemn American colonialists, he emphasizes that they intended to help. In fact, he considers their Philippine "experiment" in social engineering "a noble dream." "The U.S. conquest of the Philippines had been as cruel as any conflict in the annals of imperialism," he writes, "but hardly had it ended before Americans began to atone for its brutality." Uncritical acceptance of that claim has long made it difficult for both Filipinos and Americans to perceive the destructive dynamic of their relationship. Since the conquest, Americans have taught Filipinos that their intentions have been "benevolent," as President William McKinley said in 1898. McKinley's remark was a point of departure for what historian Renato Constantino has called "the miseducation of the Filipino," a process that regrettably continues to this day.

But such glosses have also played an important role in the miseducation of Americans. Karnow's word carries considerable weight in liberal-establishment circles, in part because of his past work on China and Vietnam, and so he is well placed to dispel some of the myths that have been passed down over the years. But rather than demystify, he has given new life to some of the most pernicious of these. ("Filipinos did not need to be beaten into American civilization," a

*Peter Tarr has reported on the Philippines for* The Nation *and is completing a book on the Philippine-American relationship.*


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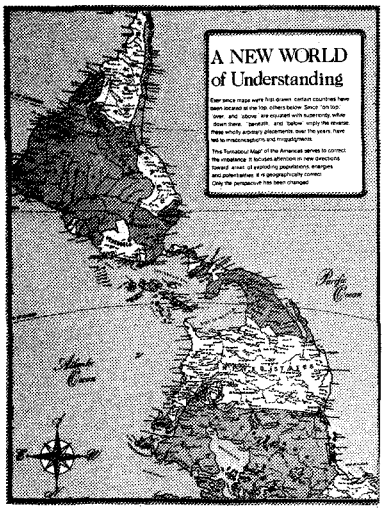


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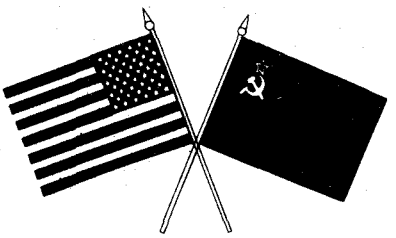

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reviewer in *New York* suggested after reading *In Our Image*. "They embraced a benevolent regime that greatly improved education and health facilities.")

In discussing how Americans "atoned" for the brutality of their conquest, Karnow runs through that familiar list of "benefits" derived by Filipinos from America's "uniquely benign" colonialism: improvements in sanitation and health care, construction of roads, bridges and schools, and the creation of an "honest judiciary" and an ostensibly democratic political system. The implication, not clearly addressed, is that these advances would not have been made without American help.

The transmission of "democratic values" has always been regarded as the most precious of these "benefits"—as many Filipinos today would readily attest. Karnow's account lends credence to this view. He writes: "The United States also accorded the Filipinos unusual latitude to govern themselves, even though its motives were less than idealistic," as if to suggest that motivations were less important than reality. But the reality was that suffrage in colonial times was limited to a very small group of property owners, whose installation as governors, mayors and petty bureaucrats was the centerpiece of the American plan to exercise control over Filipinos with a minimum expenditure of energy.

The American brand of colonialism turned out to be a smiling kind of death for Filipino nationalism, as U.S. sponsorship of the tiny, self-interested elite (which had mostly opposed the revolution of 1896-98) not only "perpetuated" its members' power over the bulk of the population, as Karnow puts it, but in fact elevated them to unprecedented dominance. The two most prominent Filipino politicians of the colonial period, Manuel Quezon and Sergio Osmeña, both privately opposed independence until after 1935, despite their public statements to the contrary (they had no compunction about deceiving their own people). They had been brought into the colonial government as young men and matured into the sort of compromised nationalists of whom the first American civil governor, William Howard Taft, might have dreamed: They spent more energy vying for control of a relatively unimportant Philippine legislature (whose initiatives were subject to American veto) than in addressing a host of serious domestic problems.

Karnow's "Immaculate Conception" view of American policy in the imperial age, to use a phrase coined by Stuart Creighton Miller, is in evidence from the beginning of his account of the period. He adheres, for instance, to the outdated and specious view that the man responsible for American policy, President McKinley, was pushed into the Philippines by willful imperialists like Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Mahan (a naval strategist), and by a populace thirsting for foreign adventure.

This picture of McKinley brings to mind Ronald Reagan: His "sincerity and virtuous innocence were exceeded only by his ignorance." Karnow apparently accepts McKinley's account of his decision to take the Philippines, as the President described it to a group of Methodist ministers who gathered at the White House in November 1899, nine months after the start of the Philippine-American war. The Philippines "dropped into our laps," the President told the clergymen, and this being the case, all we could possibly do was try to "uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died." Having made this decision late one night, while down on his knees praying to "Almighty God for light and guidance," McKinley said he then "went to bed . . . and slept soundly." This is one of the most improbable of all Immaculate Conception myths about the origins and motivations of American foreign policy, yet Karnow questions it in only the weakest of ways, suggesting that the President should have "explored other courses of action." Another tale that Karnow relates—again he is convinced of its veracity—is that McKinley couldn't locate the Philippines on a map "within two thousand miles" until *after* Commodore George Dewey sailed into Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, and sank the Spanish fleet. This fable is repeated as fact in every one of the reviews of *In Our Image* that have come across my desk.

Americans did not actively contemplate seizing the Philippines prior to the advent of war with Spain, but analyzing the imperial urge on the basis of such anecdotes is inadequate. The Philippines did not "drop into our laps." One of Karnow's shortcomings is that he doesn't consider the Philippine adventure fully in the context of American ideology of the period. In attributing responsibility for American imperialism to a "cabal" of Rough Rider types, he,

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like many previous historians, effectively absolves an entire nation. In so doing, he makes it possible to dismiss the whole messy colonial "experiment" as a "great aberration," to use Carl Degler's memorable phrase.

Starting as they did from a premise of moral superiority, Americans who planned and fought the war in the Philippines—with McKinley, until his assassination, in charge—were able to rationalize all manner of atrocities. In 1899, a month after McKinley described the virgin birth of U.S. policy, Gen. William Shafter advised the American public that it "may be necessary to kill half the [Philippine] population in order to bring perfect justice to the other half." This extraordinary statement deserves much more attention than it has received, for General Shafter was revealing the horrid extreme to which self-righteousness can lead a people. For all the high-minded rhetoric of McKinley and others, turn-of-the-century imperialism, American and European, was grounded in racist fear, and can thus be seen as an anticipation of modern totalitarianism, as Hannah Arendt has suggested. Karnow apparently hasn't considered this.

The growing fear of the 1880s and the early 1890s, ultimately addressed through the flexing of American muscle in the Caribbean and the Pacific, was best expressed by Theodore Roosevelt during his 1898 New York gubernatorial campaign: "Let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out." This remark, which may seem more appropriate to our own time than Roosevelt's, was regarded in 1898 as a proper application of Darwinian logic.

American industry, after several decades of fabulous expansion following the Civil War, seemed to men like Roosevelt and McKinley to be in danger. American manufacturers were fully capable of supplying domestic needs; but if they were to expand further and thus realize their potential, they would need access to markets overseas. The prospect of dominating commerce in the Pacific, and especially in China, had been on the minds of American merchants since the early days of the Republic, and on the eve of the twentieth century the dream finally seemed within reach. American stepping stones in the Pacific—"coaling stations" on Hawaii, Guam, and Midway and Wake Islands—had been secured in the 1880s and early 1890s, while the Navy embarked on a dramatic shipbuilding


# UNDERSTANDING THEM

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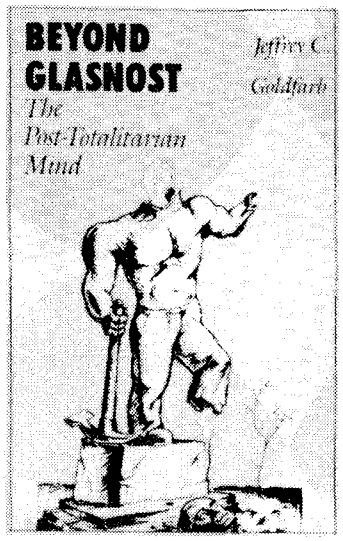


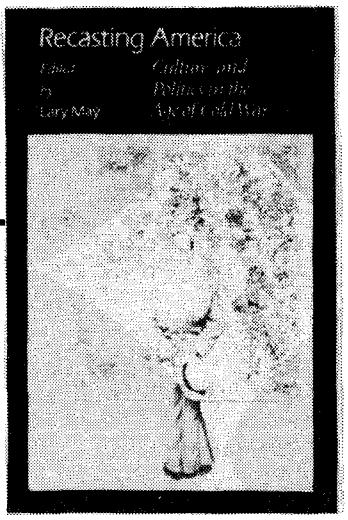


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program. On the eve of the war with Spain, the Philippines seemed the next logical step in the Pacific—a potential American Hong Kong, as some in Congress suggested. A war plan that included seizure of the Philippines was prepared in 1896.

If the motives for U.S. imperialism were largely commercial, why was war necessary? The answer is, at least in part, that the idea of American superiority that propelled commerce overseas was based on racist dogma; white America thought itself to be at the cutting edge of civilization. Progress demanded expansion; and in 1898, racism made conquest appear both necessary and justifiable. Ironically, the "brutality" of Spanish colonials was cited by Americans as a principal motivation for war in Cuba and the Philippines. Once Spain had been defeated, however, and a military government was installed in Havana, such talk was forgotten. Now the enemy was a band of "savage Malay tribes." Hence, General Shafter's remark about extermination was not only plausible but was in fact well received. "Long overdue," said *The New York Times* of McKinley's decision to adopt Indian Wars tactics against the Filipinos. As Gen. Adna Chaffee told *The Atlanta Constitution*, "If you should hear of a few Filipinos more or less being put away, don't grow too sentimental over it." Gen. Jacob (Howlin' Jake) Smith later vowed to make Samar Island "a howling wilderness," and ordered his men to "kill and burn," sparing no one over the age of 10.

Americans were able to say and do these things because they regarded their Filipino enemies as inferior. This was no aberration, as the Vietnam experience should remind us. Howlin' Jake Smith was court-martialed in 1902, found guilty and retired without punishment by President Roosevelt; imperialist amnesia set in rapidly. It strikes me that Karnow, too, wants to sweep aside the worst of the imperial experience so as to make more convincingly his point about American benevolent intent. It strikes me that at several points in the narrative Karnow is trying to convince himself. This ambivalence renders his sentimental imperialism dangerous; we as Americans must come down on one side or the other, or risk cruelly perpetuating the patron-client relationship. Millions of Filipinos today are confused about what actually happened in their past and about how best to cope with their American "benefactors." Books like Karnow's only make things worse.

As fighting in the Philippines came to an end, Secretary of War Elihu Root drafted instructions for the commissioners entrusted with establishing American rule; Karnow says he did so "inspired" by a "high moral purpose." Here, as in his treatment of McKinley, the author is remarkably incurious. Root's instructions say, in part, that the American commissioners should attempt to establish a government "not for our satisfaction . . . but for the happiness, peace and prosperity of the people of the Philippine Islands." But Karnow cuts the quotation short in his citation. It ends in this obfuscating legalism: "to the fullest extent consistent with the accomplishment of the indispensable requisites of just and effective government." This qualification enabled Governor Taft to impose severe censorship and sedition laws; it gave American officials license to do as they pleased, and indeed to tell the story of the conquest as they saw fit. More obviously, of course, in considering Root's "high moral purpose," one has to wonder how a nation dedicated to the welfare of the Filipinos could possibly justify bringing about the deaths of


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between a quarter-million and 1 million of them in the span of a few years.

Karnow makes a comment in his preface that helps us understand his less-than-penetrating analysis. "I have attempted to tell the story through individuals as they behaved at the time," he says, "avoiding the revisionist tendency to impose today's ethics on yesterday's norms." In a book that purports to examine the origins of American imperialism and its effects on a subject people, this is more than a disappointment; it is a methodological smokescreen. Karnow is no more objective than are authors of the secondary accounts upon whom he leans for "facts." Karnow's claim of ethical neutrality is preposterous; *In Our Image* is full of ethical judgments, and in the main they indicate the author's inclination to explain away the American colonial impulse.

Can American intent in the Philippines properly be considered "benign"? In keeping with the Immaculate Conception view, Karnow believes that American colonialism was "a model of enlightenment," especially compared with contemporary European strains. The repugnant assumption here is that one imperialism may be better than another. We usurped the Filipinos' freedom—and we still play a "decisive" role in Philippine affairs, as Karnow admits. Yet Karnow endorses the view, advanced by the architects of American colonial policy, that through our "improvements" we managed, at least in part, to "atone" for our sins. The fact is that American "improvements" have had relatively little effect on the lives of most Filipinos, and any historian who fails to appreciate this fact, or who subordinates it to the self-justifying qualifications of American colonists, is bound to miss the pathos of what has happened in the Philippines since 1898.

Ninety years into "special relations," and after the expenditure of tens of billions of American dollars, America's "showcase" in Asia has been surpassed by nearly all of its neighbors. Three-fourths of Filipinos still live in abysmal poverty. The poor don't figure very prominently in Karnow's book—but then, it is a center-stage history. Indeed, that is where Karnow seems most comfortable; he makes much, for instance, of his personal relationships with the Aquinos and the Marcoses. But what of the 40 million poor? When he tells us, very late in the book, of his trip to the sugar island of Negros, the author travels about in the company of a rich sugar planter. He says of the *hacendero*'s field hands: "Their servitude ought to have made them sullen, but that day they were gaily celebrating their patron saint." Karnow interprets the laborers' attitudes on the basis of what the planter tells him after they have driven away. He doesn't show any interest in finding out for himself.

As it happened, the planter told Karnow that his workers were Communist sympathizers. This leads, at long last, to a discussion of the New People's Army and the Communist Party of the Philippines. In two and a half pages Karnow seems to dismiss a movement that presently commands the sympathies of between 5 million and 10 million Filipinos. The guerrillas he meets don't seem exotic enough: They wear T-shirts, smoke Marlboros and speak English. The author seems disappointed that Negros "was not . . . Yenan."

Karnow's vision of the Philippine future is bleak. He believes that Filipinos in the post-Marcos period face obstacles that they can "not conceivably hurdle alone," and suggests that "only the United States" can "carry them through." He predicts a continuation of a "special relationship," in part because American withdrawal from military bases


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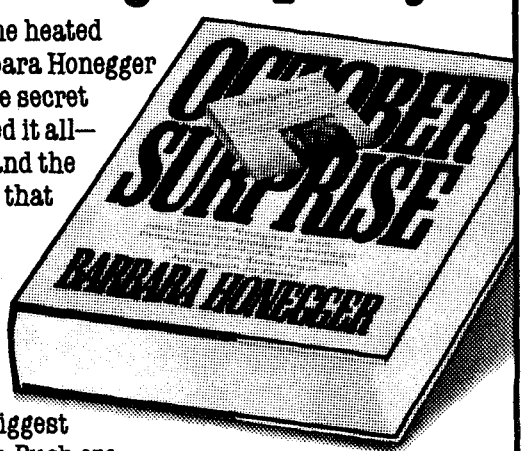


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at Clark air field and Subic Bay "would symbolize a family schism for most Filipinos." But it's perverse to oppose American withdrawal on these grounds, for it will never be easy to make the break. Americans can endlessly rationalize U.S. intervention in Philippine affairs. One can only hope that a new generation of Filipinos will be able to "slay the American father," as Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus recently suggested. One hopes, too, that young Filipinos who may come across Karnow's book will neither be daunted by his half-conscious reproduction of the imperialist argument, nor intimidated by his insulting suggestion that their fathers and mothers "submitted voluntarily to their own exploitation." It's much more complicated than that, as Karnow should know. □

# FILMS.

## STUART KLAWANS

**The Films of Amos Gitai**
**Azul**
**Scandal**

Amos Gitai became that great rarity in Israel, a filmmaker of importance, through an act of censorship. In 1980, at age 30, he made the documentary *House* for Israeli Television; the authorities were so displeased that they impounded the film. Until then, Gitai had been primarily a student of architecture who made films as a sideline. With the suppression of *House*, he changed careers and went on to complete a stunning trilogy on the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. That early trilogy is part of the first American retrospective of the work of Amos Gitai, organized by the International Film Circuit. It will be shown at New York City's Public Theater through the end of May and then will tour the United States until summer 1990. I feel no shame in lapsing into the language of promoters: You must see these films.

Under its deceptively simple title, *House* conceals a large chunk of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in a form that makes its realities inescapable. Here, instead of the well-worn abstractions—confiscation, exploitation, oppression—you get rock-hard particulars, which seem all the more jarring for the crudity of the images. The film now exists only as a transfer from videocassette, so that everything has the harsh, washed-out look of things seen in the desert sun—which is fitting, since the documentary begins at a quarry near Hebron.

There, Palestinians are breaking rocks under the broiling sun. The Israelis forbid them the use of dynamite, for reasons of security, and so the workers must swing sledgehammers, breaking stone for use in Israeli construction projects. The camera lingers on the laborers, letting you sense the sweat and dust. The hammer falls ring like blows to the brain. The soundtrack (which often leads a life of its own in a Gitai film) juices up the sledgehammers with synthesizer music. Some of the stone, according to a carefully understated caption, is destined for use "in the house that is our subject."

Next, Gitai shows a group of Palestinian workers getting onto a bus at 4 A.M. to go to the construction site in Jerusalem. Then come the interviews: with an Israeli professor who has bought the house in question and is expanding it; with a Palestinian mason, whose own house was bulldozed in 1948; with the contractor, who talks on the soundtrack about socialist ideals while the camera explores a refugee camp; with an old Algerian-Jewish couple—plain, cheerful, simple people—who had lived in the house when it was public housing; and finally with Dr. Dajani. A grave, deep-voiced old man with a goatee and heavy eyeglasses, he is the Palestinian who owned the house until 1948. Accompanied by the film crew, Dr. Dajani steps for the first time in thirty-two years into what had been his courtyard. "It's absolutely changed, you see," he intones. His voice is firm; his face is impassive. You don't need an outward show to know what he feels.

No polemicist writing a flyer could have made a clearer statement than Gitai did with *House*; and yet the film is so full of specific pieces of stone, individual speakers, unrepeatable moments, that the mind reels from the complexity of what he has revealed. This has turned out to be his method as a documentarian: to use a particular object or locale—a house, a valley in Haifa, even a can of pineapple—as the locus for a network of relationships. It's as if he had set out to realize the project Sartre sketched in *Search for a Method*. "It's enough for me to open my window," Sartre wrote:

> I see a church, a bank, a café. There you have three collectives. This 1,000-franc note is another; for another, there's the newspaper I just bought. And

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> the . . . reproach you can make against Marxism is that it has never bothered to study these objects in themselves, that is, at all the levels of social life.

I cannot say whether Gitai knew or cared about this passage. All I know is that *House* carried out its suggestion with staggering success. Gitai followed it with *Wadi* in 1981, in which the valley of the title is the locus for considering people who live as squatters and are marginal to Israeli society: a Palestinian laborer, two Holocaust survivors who cannot adapt, a happily married Jewish-Palestinian couple. For the third work in his early trilogy, Gitai turned to the locus of a field—the field patrolled by Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza.

*Field Diary*, made in 1982, is perhaps the nerviest of all these early films. Gitai and his crew simply set out to film wherever and whatever they could, which led to a recurring image: the hand of a soldier reaching out to cover the lens. The first of these encounters with authority happens in front of the home of Bassam Shak'a, the Mayor of Nablus, whose legs were blown off by freelance Israeli bombers. A group of kibbutzniks have come to pay their respects to Shak'a and discuss their hopes for peace. Gitai's crew, when not arguing with the soldiers and fighting off attempts to mask the lens, record an impromptu interview with Shak'a's wife, a smiling, attractive woman of middle years who gamely describes in English the daily harassment her family suffers. The kibbutzniks mill about, waiting for clearance to enter the house; Shak'a's wife tries to act as interview subject and hostess simultaneously; the leader of the soldiers casually offers a sexual insult to the camerawoman, then decides to arrest one of the crew. And this, mind you, is only the first five minutes.

In more recent films, Gitai has ventured into new territory with a feature-length dramatization of the Book of Esther, starring a Moroccan-Israeli in the title role and a Palestinian as Mordecai. He has also shot a feature-length documentary about the Eurythmics' 1987 tour of Japan. I have not seen either yet, but the advance word is good.

Users of industrial-strength film criticism, who may have heard of Gitai but not seen his work, might want to know if the rumors of formalist rigor are justified. I would say that, in the early documentaries at least, he has shown little interest in style other than displaying an inordinate fondness for filming out

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of moving vehicles. It seems more to the point to note that Gitai has a sense of humor. When some Israeli newspapers claimed he had made *House* for the Palestine Liberation Organization, Gitai replied, "I offered it to Arafat, but he doesn't buy films in black and white."

As an old house in Jerusalem brings together various levels of Israeli and Palestinian society in Gitai's film, so does the subject of poetry illuminate the lives of Nicaraguans in *Azul*. Produced and directed by Roland Legiardi-Laura, *Azul* was voted best film by a new director in this year's Global Village Documentary Film Festival. Less compelling than Gitai's documentaries and far more self-consciously artistic, it is a thoughtful, meticulously shot, amazingly comprehensive study of a country where poetry is the national pastime.

More than that: Perhaps no people since the ancient Greeks have defined themselves to such a degree through poetry. As Pablo Antonio Cuadra insists, Nicaragua flies on two wings of sovereignty. The wing of political sovereignty is Sandino; the wing of cultural sovereignty, he says, is Rubén Dario. *Azul* proves the point by recording poets at every level of society, from Natalia Sequeira Chavarría—a peasant who began writing through one of the workshops Ernesto Cardenal organized at Solentiname—to soldiers in the field, to Minister of the Interior Tomás Borge. The latter, decked out in full uniform and tinted eyeglasses, obliges Legiardi-Laura by reciting a masturbatory poem he composed in prison. It's remarkably good, too.

Although the section with Borge is conducted as an interview, the film stays away from the talking heads format at least half the time. With a good many of his subjects, Legiardi-Laura has combined soundtracks of their poems with visual interpretations. The latter seemed to me to be unusually successful. Illustrative at times (though often in oblique and surprising ways), surrealistically independent in other cases, the visual interpretations are paced so as not to distract from the spoken words. Action on the screen tends to punctuate the poems rather than interrupt them. For the realization of Luis Rocha's "Verano en Cinco," for example, the camera at one point shows a dusty village street on which little is happening. The ear is free to concentrate till the end of the stanza, when the poem mentions a dog trotting around a corner. Then, as if by a happy coincidence, a dog walks into the frame, following the lines of the stanza just enough to confirm them.

These visualizations vary according to the styles of the poets. For Carlos Rigby, a poet of the rambling, declamatory school, Legiardi-Laura contrives something close to a rock video. For Cuadra's tribute to Sandino, "Poema del Momento Extranjero en la Selva," he adopts a minimalist approach, plunging his camera forward in a long tracking shot into the jungle foliage, which appears in altered colors. Leonel Rugama, author of "La Tierra Es un Satelite de la Luna," is dead, killed in the Somoza years; so Legiardi-Laura trains his lens on the author Omar Cabezas, who delivers the poem beautifully and simply, looking into the camera, then turns and just as simply walks away. Carlos Martínez Rivas—easily my favorite poet in the film—composes Surrealist-influenced verse, so Legiardi-Laura cuts between the poet reading at his work table and a series of incongruous but intuitively fitting images of bullfights and the circus.

The dominant theme of *Azul*, of course, is the role of art in society, and in

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particular in a revolutionary society. No one with fixed opinions on the subject will find comfort in the film. Cuadra, who so fiercely upholds the example of Sandino, sharply criticizes the Sandinistas for censoring *La Prensa*. He is answered by other interview subjects, who put forth arguments too familiar to readers of *The Nation* to repeat here. The virtue of *Azul*, though, like Amos Gitai's documentaries, is that it provides you with specifics. The best response to Cuadra's complaint is the mere existence of the shambling, grandiloquent figure of Martínez Rivas, who apparently goes about his business unmolested, declaring himself to be "a man without an ideology." And the best support for Cuadra's position is the interview with Daisy Zamora, a state-approved writer who is the very image of official culture—stiff, self-satisfied, mediocre.

But even Zamora cannot spoil the spirit of *Azul*. Let us give the last word not to her, not to the lively (and alcohol-fueled) Martínez Rivas, but to the peasant-poet Natalia Sequeira Chavarría. What, she is asked, is the good of poetry? "If you can say poetry," she explains, "you can say other things. You don't have to be shy."

Gitai's early trilogy and *Azul* are works of the imagination, thoroughly informed by the spirits of their makers. They are also labeled as documentaries, which means they will be seen by a few people at a time in scattered screenings. *Scandal*, on the other hand, is a major motion picture, destined for a theater near you, wherever you might be. This retelling of the Christine Keeler–John Profumo affair is not documentary but docudrama, presented with no point of view at all, except perhaps for that of Sgt. Joe Friday. If you want just the facts, *Scandal* will deliver them.

What advantages has the big-studio treatment brought to *Scandal*? First, it has allowed for the presence of good actors, including Joanne Whalley-Kilmer as Keeler, Bridget Fonda as her friend and rival Mandy Rice-Davies, Ian McKellan as Profumo and, above all, the remarkable John Hurt as Dr. Stephen Ward, who was convicted post-mortem of pimping but was guilty mostly of social climbing. A fine cast—too bad they have so little to work with by way of characters.

As written by Michael Thomas—originally, I'm told, for a miniseries format—*Scandal* has all the dramatic complexity of an educational filmstrip. Characters tell each other flat out who they are and why they've done things, and these explanations generally can be concluded in a single line of monosyllables. Occasionally, you see a hint of what could have been done with the material, as when Profumo sneaks away from a rendezvous with Keeler, and the Soviet naval attaché, Ivanov, immediately arrives. Imagine if Joe Orton had lived to write *Scandal*; imagine if Tom Stoppard could tear himself away from bashing the Soviet Union long enough to come up with his own version. Imagine, for that matter, if someone had given George Kuchar enough videotape and Salvation Army costumes to realize *The Christine Keeler Story*. No such luck. All you get is Joanne Whalley-Kilmer solemnly declaring that John Hurt is the only man she has ever loved, and John Hurt in his turn rising in court, with the camera jolting forward to arrest him in close-up, crying out that the barristers aren't being fair to his back-stabbing protégée.

The director, Michael Caton-Jones, sinks to the level of the screenplay. He might not have anything to say, but he's got enough in the budget for lots of art

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direction and period music. When all else fails, he resorts to the high-gloss, fashion-photographer approach that the studio makes possible.

The characters in *Scandal* are wont to advise one another, "Wet your lips." And that, in effect, is what the film does in every scene. □

# ART.

## ARTHUR C. DANTO

### The 1989 Whitney Biennial

In the waning weeks of 1988, it was impossible to meet an art-worlder who was not burning to know what one thought about IT. IT could refer to nothing but the Sonnabend Gallery exhibition of recent works by Jeff Koons, a young and fiercely entrepreneurial artist who stood, it was reported, to gross $5 million if, as seemed likely, he were to sell out that show and two others exactly like it being held concurrently in Cologne and Chicago. A fair amount of critical boilerplate had been generated in response to Koons, all of it of the tiresome order that speaks of commodification, simulacreation and late capitalism—categories that apply, unfortunately, to so many things that it would be difficult to explain on their basis the peculiar *frisson* felt by those who attended this show. "A new low" is what Hilton Kramer of course wrote, but he writes in much the same way on just about everything ("depressing," "distressing," "appalling," "*sad!*"), and like a broken clock whose hands point always to the same black hour, is irrelevantly predictable and critically useless: You can always tell what time it *says* ("late!") but never what time it *is*. But even those who are immeasurably more responsive to the serious issues posed by contemporary art were airing a question that I thought long dead: Is it (is IT) art? And it struck me that the one sure formula for artistic success in New York is to produce a body of work that causes those who think they have seen everything to wonder afresh whether some important boundary might not have been transgressed.

The boundary between art and nonart appeared to me sufficiently elastic that it could easily contain most of what I had seen up to then of Koons's work. The 1987 Whitney Biennial, for example, displayed a fishtank in which two bas-

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ketballs were immersed and a somewhat prophetic stainless steel replica of a plastic bunny. It was explained to me with great patience that it is exceedingly difficult to partially immerse basketballs as Koons had learned to do by consulting with engineers from M.I.T.; I had read of a collector who, having purchased one of these works, was thrilled that Koons had agreed to install it himself. But neither this misapplied technical virtuosity nor the vapid steel bunnikin would be enough, in 1988, to arouse a vexed query as to their arthood. It was plain that something more powerful, more threatening, even, was drawing the glazed and jaded of the art world, almost against their aesthetic will, to Sonnabend's for a perverse flutter. In the *Republic*, Plato writes of Leontius, son of Aglion, who once glimpsed some corpses of executed men: "He felt a desire to see them, and also a dread and abhorrence of them; for a time he struggled and covered his eyes, but at length the desire got the better of him; and forcing them open, he ran up to the dead bodies, saying, 'Look, ye wretches, take your fill of the fair sight.'" This earliest discussion of what the ancients termed *akrasia*, or weakness of will, fit the common conflicted attitude of the art world to perfection in the case of Koons. I knew I was in for something morbid when, out of a pretended sense of critical duty, I paid my visit to "the fair sight." I found the things terrifying.

There is an order of imagery so far beyond the pale of good or even bad taste as to be aesthetically, and certainly artistically, disenfranchised. Objects that belong to it are too submerged even to be classed as kitsch, for kitsch believes itself to be the high taste it instead pathetically parodies. I am referring to such things as cute figurines in thruway gift shops; the plaster trophies one wins for knocking bottles over in cheap carnivals; marzipan mice; the dwarves and reindeer that appear at Christmastime on suburban laws or the crèche figures before firehouses in Patchogue and Mastic; bath toys; porcelain or plastic saints; what goes into Easter baskets; ornaments in fishbowls; comic heads attached to bottle-stoppers in home bars. Koons has claimed this imagery as his own, has taken over its colors, its cloying saccharinities, its gluey sentimentalities, its blank indifference to the existence and meaning of high art, and given it a monumentality that makes it flagrantly visible, a feast for appetites no one dreamt existed and which the art world hates itself for acknowledging. There was a figure of a man smiling with intolerable benignity at an armful of blue puppies that haunts me like a bad dream. The aggregation of rebarbative effigies at the Sonnabend Gallery was a vision of an aesthetic hell.

As it is the mission of the Whitney Biennial to display the leading artistic productions of the preceding two-year period, it was of course mandatory that this year's show should include a representative sample of Koons's latest work. There are three pieces: a porcelain girl, busty and lusty, smiling in rapture as she presses a Pink Panther toy to her bosom; a John the Baptist in a shaggy porcelain garment, smiling over a penguin and a piglet with gilded snout and trotters; and a stack of wooden barnyard animals in graduated sizes, with an immense simpering pig as anchor-brute. (Koons's figures are executed for him by Italian craftsmen.) You will certainly want to see these preternatural vulgarities, if only for the pleasure of clucking


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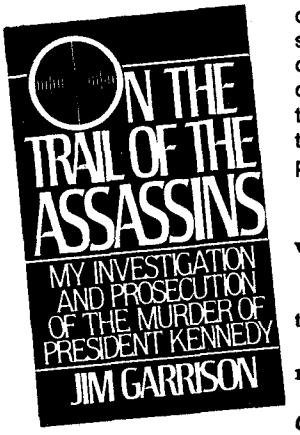


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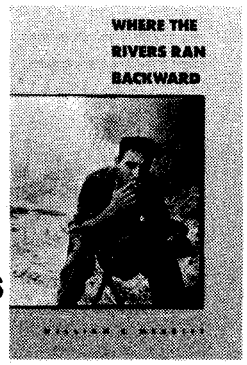


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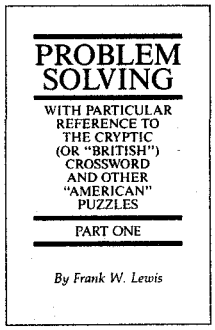
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over the state of an art world that hath such creatures in it. But their effect is somewhat muted by the circumstance of being shown with other things. Part of the aesthetic terrorism of the Sonnabend show lay in the fact that nothing was there except Koonses, so one had the scary sense that his killer *chotchkes* had taken over the world. Each augmented the presence of each and amplified its incredibility. But at the Whitney, somehow, the objects have subsided into giant bric-a-brac, and this may be one of the costs of the necessary pluralism and the salon format imposed upon biennials, where Koons is just one among the main artists to have done something worth singling out over the past two years.

This year's Biennial is almost bland, as if the curators were anxious that the show not call attention to itself, and perhaps an effort always should be made to put some sort of critical distance between this exhibition and the art world it disinterestedly showcases. What was wrong with the terrible Biennial of 1985 was that it undertook to be part of the reality it was meant to represent, as the Whitney sought to make itself over into an annex of the East Village. This year's Biennial is a lesson in how to meditate upon work as virulent as Koons's while standing immune from its conceptual toxins. And yet, for perhaps this very reason, our experience at the Whitney of the same sort of objects which but a few months ago aroused such violent feelings in the gallery is very different. And this in turn makes vivid the ineradicable difference between the museum and the gallery as formats for experiencing art, even when the museum, as in the case of the Whitney, gets so close to the gallery format as to get burned, as happened in 1985. The Biennial can at best awaken memories of experiences it has no way of offering directly.

On the other hand, no Biennial can be a pure transparency, with no content other than that given by its displayed objects, taken in their individual identities. Even if the curators intended to make no statement of their own by means of the objects they selected and installed, there is no way in which some statement would not be implied, if only because the objects taken together define moods and feelings they might not possess by themselves. One experiences these exhibitions not simply as anthologies of what has been made and shown since the last time but to mark what changes there may be in the general sensibility of those as close

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to the art world as the Biennial curators of necessity must be. One uses the exhibition as a probe into the *spirit* of the present moment. And from this perspective the Koons pieces are more than samples drawn from a population of artworks: They are emblems of the spirit expressed in the Biennial, and help define the present state of things.

Consider from this perspective the porcelain girl with her radiant erotic smile, clutching her toy panther as if symbolically holding onto her childhood, and as if at a moment of intense play. The work is itself some kind of play; it also has play as its content. But the spirit of play *is* the spirit of this show, and the spirit of the times as well, as if the show has captured the times for us. The 1989 Biennial is a toyland for sophisticates.

There are, for example, two immense works by Chris Macdonald in roughly carved wood that look like pull toys for giant boys. Each is titled *Work Truck Variation*, and each would be a showstopper at F.A.O. Schwartz. There is an enormous wall hanging by Mike Kelley called *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, whose primary component is stuffed toys stitched together. Like its companion piece, *Plush Kundalini and Chackra Set*, also made of stuffed toys, it would liven up any nursery if the parents had an interest in accelerating their offspring's taste for advanced art (and in the latter case for Tantric practices). Chris Burden suspends from fine wires 625 effigies of submarines in a work called *All the Submarines of the United States of America*, which is doubtless intended to make a statement about our naval might but which looks like a lavish mobile for an immensely privileged baby with hawkish (or dovish) parents. Robert Gober displays a playful playpen (in the shape of an X), as well as a bassinet with a hand-painted flannel cushion. Ashley Bickerton's fabrications in tough plastic look like the sort of gear a graduating boy might want. Sherrie Levine is still appropriating away, but has given over rephotographing Walker Evans's sharecropper photographs and is showing instead frames from *Krazy Kat*—wonderful for the children's wall. And Donald Baechler shows some very large paintings that appropriate figures—of a little girl and of a tree, for example—that could be projected enlargements of drawings a child might have made. The abstract paintings of Cary Smith and of Andrew Spence have the squares of board games as motifs.

What could it mean that play, that references to childhood, should have become the dominating theme of this show, or perhaps even of the art world itself? And what might it mean for our general times if, as it is widely supposed, the artist is ahead of everyone else in sensing the imperatives of the historical moment? It may of course be but a passing thing, but it may also have a deeper significance. I, for example, could not forbear thinking of the way in which that great commentator, Alexandre Kojève, epitomized the powerful Hegelian concept of the end of history:

> The end of human time, or History . . . means, quite simply, the cessation of action in the full sense of the term. Practically, this means the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions. And also the disappearance of philosophy. . . . But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely: art, love, play, etc.: in short, everything that makes man *happy*.

So the atmosphere of play may itself be a metaphor of an end having been reached, as if this were the first posthistorical Biennial conscious of its being posthistorical.

Of course, I have sought to identify only the dominant metaphor of the show, and there is a great deal of work that does not fit this perhaps too-convenient scheme. It does not apply to the paintings of Ross Bleckner, nor to those of April Gornik (though the latter have an enchanted, fairy tale quality about them). Nor does it at all apply to the work of David Reed, which really does seek to situate itself in connection with the great history of painting, as if Reed were still driving forward a tradition that goes back to the Renaissance. Reed's work is conspicuously of the present moment, even if it does endorse the great pictorial intelligence transmitted to us by the masters. Yet even if we could not think of it being done at an earlier time, it executes the demands of pictorial space, though it rethinks each of its parameters. The dimensions of these paintings exaggerate horizontality or verticality, with the dominant dimension being three to four times that of the other dimension. The characteristic image is of some serpentine form, as if abstracted from the *figura serpentina* of Baroque or Mannerist art, coiling and uncoiling with a certain ferocity, and appearing to move out of the frame. The figures appear to be immersed in some transparent medium, smooth and thick

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and curiously at odds with their energy, leaving us unsure whether these are paintings or photographs. It is a mystery how the forms are made: Sometimes it seems as if they have been extruded from a nozzle rather than painted. Reed inserts rectangles within rectangles, each containing an image that appears to comment on the main images, very much as if the works were contemporary versions of polyptychs, or as if the inserted rectangles were predella spaces. The colors are futuristic—colors that could not have existed before the invention of some very advanced polymer.

Nor am I certain where to fit into this picture the fact that very nearly half the artists selected express themselves in film or video. Since these use real time, one would have to devote a fair number of hours between now and July 5 to see the 1989 Whitney Biennial in its artistic plenitude. I did, however, see a performance and film by Eleanor Antin. In the performance, Antin plays the role of Eleanora Antinovna, a black ballerina from the period of high Modernism in the Soviet Union, discoursing about her companion, the avant-garde film director Yevgeny Antinov, in whose film Eleanor-Eleanora plays the role of a ballerina. It is titled *The Last Night of Rasputin*, and it is a treasury of silent-film strategies and a terribly comical parody of an absolutely serious denunciation of the Romanovs by the imaginary director. In the performance part of the program, Eleanor-Eleanora looks like Koons's porcelain girl with her hair turned grey, who has traded in her Pink Panther for some of those fur foxes with their tails clamped in one another's mouths that one's Rumanian aunts used to imagine gave them an impermeable air of distinction.

Just around the corner from the video gallery are the restrooms and the phone booths, in one of which a mock security system has been installed; in the video monitor we see people entering and leaving the Whitney. The work is by Julia Scher and is called *Security by Julia, IV*. Its components are listed: "video cameras, black-and-white video monitors, video printer, time-lapse video recorders, and video switcher." I was disappointed that the list omits mention of the security guard who is certainly part of the work, dressed in a lurid pink uniform that could have been designed by Koons and seated in a glass box next to the ticket person. It seemed somehow consistent with the overall theme of the show that a security guard should be part of the art, as if life and art had passed one another going in opposite directions. But I leave as an exercise for the reader the working-out of the details. □

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# LETTERS.

(*Continued From Page 758*)

quirements for a world with no offensive weapons and an international peace force capable of assuring world peace.

Holland quite selectively leads us through four decades of U.S. foreign policy and concludes by celebrating the death of bipartisanship. Some, however, fear that there is not much to celebrate about the notion that disagreements over foreign policy "stopped at the water's edge." It is worth recalling that in the late 1940s and in the 1950s much American foreign policy, however narrowly focused, nevertheless was directed through the United Nations and was supported by both major political parties. Senator Robert Taft, considered "Mr. Republican" and the rival of Eisenhower for the G.O.P. nomination, voted against NATO because he thought it would weaken the United Nations. When pressure was put on President Eisenhower to intervene in the Congo, he had the good sense to opt for the United Nations' dealing with the troubles there. In later years bipartisan support for the United Nations waned, and unilateral actions replaced multilateral diplomacy. Not coincidentally, what followed was a series of U.S. failures in Vietnam, Lebanon, Nicaragua and elsewhere. Now that the United Nations is experiencing a second wind, has become more cost efficient, is less politicized and has improved its voting procedures regarding its budget, the time is ripe for a return of U.S. bipartisanship centered around an invigorated world organization. A good starting point would be for the United States to terminate its disgraceful status as the number-one U.N. deadbeat, owing as it does about $400 million in assessed, legal contributions.

*Eric Cox*
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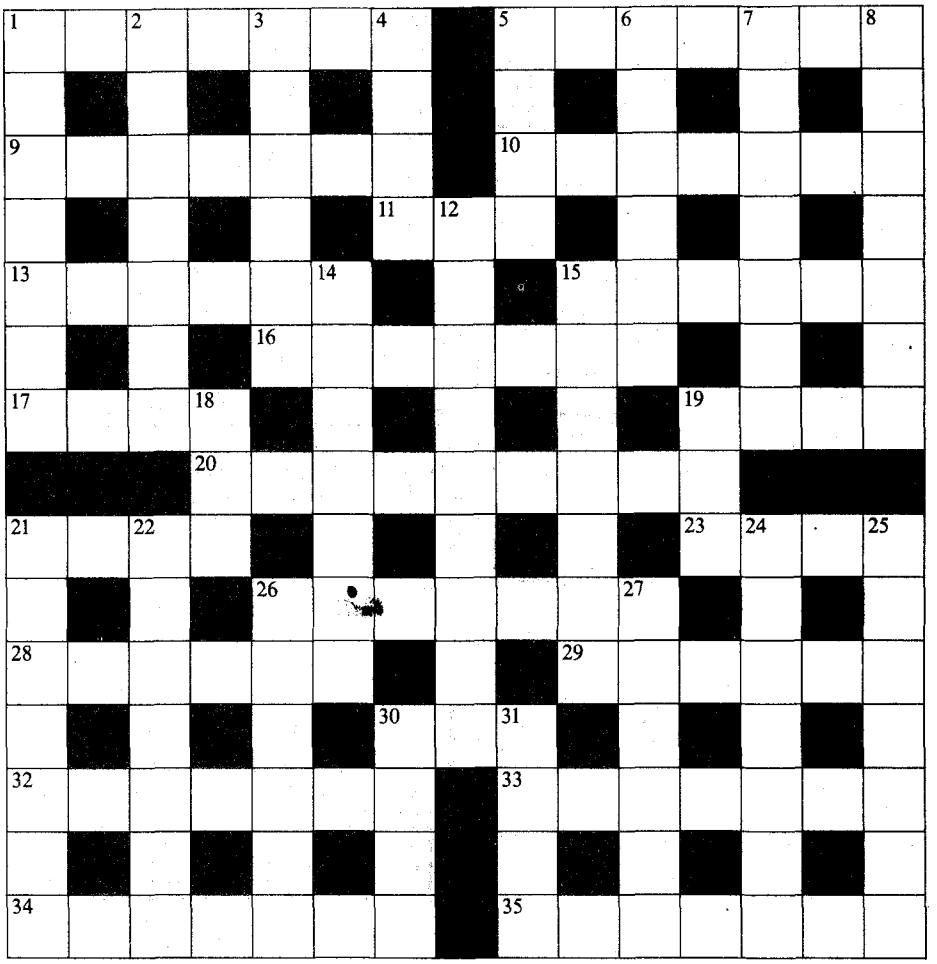
# Crossword Puzzle No. 2245

FRANK W. LEWIS



### ACROSS

1 They don't drive straight, but partly owe a version of it. (7)
5 A cowboy might do it in competition with one or two animals. (7)
9 How things are sometimes affixed—and in Paris it's in other strange surroundings. (7)
10 Are the 20 people so detached? (7)
11, and 18, 30 and 19 down Is the nervous habit of Edgar Allan merely like diamonds, as they say? One gets deserts like this, occasionally. (6,7)
13 It's the center of things, brother! (And it's very noisy!) (6)
15 How to get along badly with a foreign country? (6)
16 Is this the best British version of what goes on? (7)
17 It's a faithful body, but would one find something like a mosquito in this? (4)
19 Do only nonworkers boast this way? (4)
20 Would one unexpectedly find the candle *ici* in a foreign language? (9)
21 and 6 down Showing what might hold your data doesn't seem to be winning out! (10)
23 and 8 down A great man? Yes, oddly enough, but in a different country! (4,7)
26 Frequently goes up in France, as the bride of Dionysus. (7)
28 How things may be grasped—when the rim is broken in a sort of wheel? (6)
29 Dig up something, such as the former Scottish philosopher? (6)
30 But the set isn't necessarily black. (3)
32 He was in the vanguard of almost every experimental artistic movement, with a hundred a month shortly taking to drink overseas! (7)
33 Made an arrangement, as instructed. (7)
34 A wee sip for the bairn? (4,3)
35 Make things easier by ordering sausage! (7)

### DOWN

1 See 4
2 This strain of lab mice wouldn't be used so much nowadays—the laboratory has more modern equipment for distilling. (7)
3 You have to supplement your income to do so properly—though some consider it a way to barely get by. (3,3)
4 and 1 down A side-walk superintendant has to first before he does the second. (You have to pay attention to the hands with them.) (11)
5 It might be appropriately served in a meal to start briefly—no need for the buzzer! (4)
6 See 21 across
7 With a model to identify, you can see it has muscle. (7)
8 See 23 across
12 Annie could have been taken from one, according to a graph one made. (9)
14 Something the paleontologist might study, very uninteresting, but with no evidence of the flood. (4,3)
15 If you have done any wrong here, it could make you feel better! (7)
18 and 19 See 11 across
21 Cause for national alarm, though very very clever around here in France, too! (7)
22 Are cans likely to be bent out of shape by one they crusaded against? (7)
24 Things are certainly fishy here! (7)
25 If they don't read letters showing this up, it might be useless unless you put your foot down! (7)
26 Does he have the sound of Be Watchful around it? (6)
27 Not the first book coming out, obviously. (6)
30 See 11 across
31 Got a way with it, associated with rent at the forum, possibly. (4)

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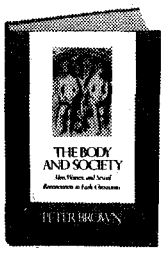


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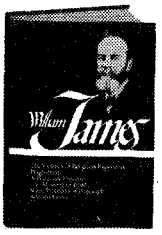


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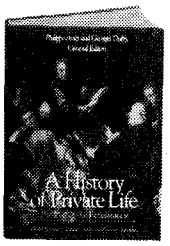


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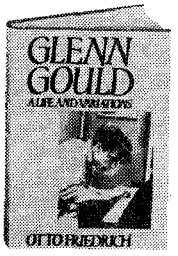


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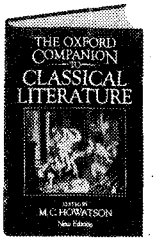


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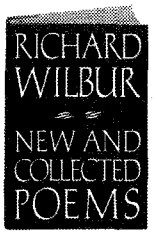


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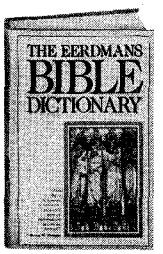


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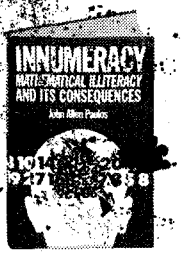


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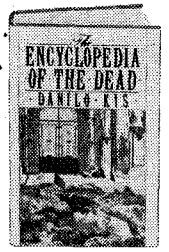


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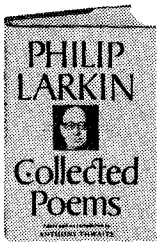


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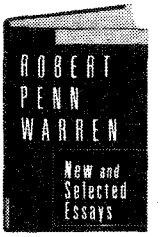


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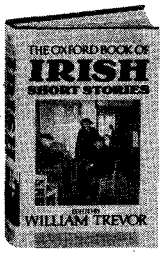


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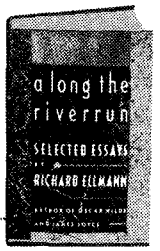


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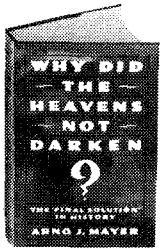


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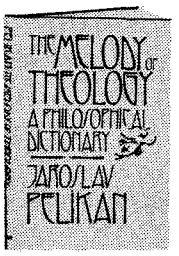


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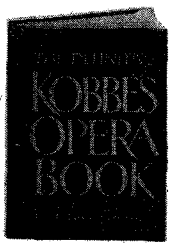


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